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The Meaning of Baptism

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The Meaning of Baptism

By
CHARLES CLAYTON MORRISON
Editor THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY

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Disciples Publication Society

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To the Memory of
MY TEACHER,
THE LATE PROFESSOR
ROBERT T. MATHEWS, LL. D.,
of Drake University,
who first led me, by suggestions which he confessed he himself had not fully worked out, to call in question the dogma of immersion-baptism, and who thus unclamped from my mind the legalistic system wherein I had been born, this book is gratefully inscribed.

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Foreword

IT IS WITH great reluctance that the author has gained the consent of his own mind to write this book and to send it forth. In a time when men's souls are vibrating to problems involving the most vital interests and ideals of humanity one's prestige is not likely to be enhanced by connecting one's name with a book on "The Meaning of Baptism." It will seem like turning from the living present to the dead past to discuss this question again. Modern-minded men in all the churches —including also the churches that have made a feature of the dogma of immersion—have little interest in the controversy. The great new issues of life and death have for them displaced those problems of ecclesiastical refinement which engaged their fathers.

But there remain great majorities of the immersionist communions to whom the baptism issue is a live issue still. Their religious thinking and custom—and conscience,

too—are embedded in legalistic and literalistic assumptions. Upon these assumptions rests their dogma of immersion-baptism. It is my conviction that those communions which have laid stress upon the physical act of immersion as equivalent to baptism and therefore invested with the authority of the Scriptures and of Christ himself, will be forever under effective inhibition against committing themselves to the greater social and spiritual program of modern religion and to practical co-operation in any program of Christian unity unless they consciously and for good and sufficient reasons abandon their immersion dogma. This dogma eclipses the great objective task of the Church for large majorities of Disciples and Baptists.

I am unable, therefore, to accept the nonchalant counsel of many educated leaders who have themselves been emancipated from the dogma and who say, "Leave the baptism question alone; get the churches interested and engaged in the larger human enterprises of religion and the baptism question will solve itself."

I do not think it will solve itself.

And meantime the dogmatic convictions with reference to it stand in the way of our getting those churches to engage themselves wholeheartedly in the more vital interests of religion. The social movement and the deeper re-

ligious ethics which our times are stressing are pale and relatively unimperative to one who believes that Christ commanded him to be immersed in water. The Christ of such an arbitrary command is not the Christ who inspires the new social idealism and the deeper spirituality. The two Christs are incongruous. And the two corresponding groups of followers of Christ are able to co-operate only half-way and then with reservations and inhibitions.

It is not because I am so much interested in the baptism question, but because I am profoundly interested in the life and death problems of modern religion that I have let myself be persuaded to write this book and to send it forth.

Among my own people, the Disciples of Christ, I am frank to say, this dogma of immersion (by this I do not mean the *practice* of immersion) has been like a ten-cent piece held before the eye, shutting out the sun. The great ideals of their movement for Christian unity have been much obscured and, for many minds, wholly eclipsed by this doctrine which Alexander Campbell introduced into their thinking not many years after their movement was launched by his more catholic-minded father. My conviction is profound and urgent that the Disciples' plea for Christian unity will continue to be abortive so long as Mr. Camp-

bell's view of baptism persists among them.

It is not solely with a purpose to shake the dogma free from the minds of those who still hold it that I have written, but to offer a positive ground upon which those who have grown indifferent to the baptism question may stand. I find the younger generation of educated Disciple ministers and church leaders in great confusion of mind on the subject. They are compelled to reckon with it because it is in the minds of their people—and besides they have to live with their New Testament!—but they have no clear and consistent conception. They are unable to preach it without falling into obscurantism, and not a few of them confess a certain sense of self-stultification in doing so.

If I have succeeded in these chapters in working out a thesis on baptism which resolves from it all elements of legalism and arbitrariness and at the same time revives it as a *preachable* subject for the modern minister I will have been fully rewarded for accepting a task which in its title has not been particularly attractive.

In preparing these chapters for the press I have been made aware of the fact that there is a certain amount of repetition from chapter to chapter. This is explained, if it is not condoned, by the fact that much of the material

first appeared serially in The Christian Century. The editorial impulse to keep gathering up anew the threads of the argument from week to week for the sake of the but half-interested or inattentive reader (whom the wise editor learns always to keep in mind) has probably led me to a degree of reiteration which would have been avoided had those chapters been written with studious book-readers in view rather than the shifting and more casual readers of a newspaper.

Just a word should be spoken concerning the point of view from which I have approached the Scriptures. I have not felt the need of utilizing the so-called "critical" results of Scripture study, save only in the chapter on "Born of Water." In the chapter on "The Great Commission" certain critical results are indicated in bare outline, but more for the purpose of completeness in the inquiry than for any relevancy to the argument. At the outset I wish both the critical and the uncritical reader to know that, except for the instance just noted, I have not needed to recast the text of the Scripture at all. I have taken it in the traditional fashion, just as it stands. Any revision of the text by critical scholarship would not affect the argument of this book in the least. What I have tried to do is to take Alexander Campbell's own New

Testament and to show that in his interpretation of baptism he was in error, in fundamental and costly error, and that his teaching on this subject misled the movement for Christian unity of which he was the recognized champion.

It is not a wholly comfortable task to set oneself squarely against a doctrine that one's own people have enforced as conspicuously as the Disciples have enforced and defended the doctrine of immersion-baptism. There will be those, no doubt, who will interpret this book as an expression of disloyalty. But others will feel, I am sure, as they follow the argument, that the book is an expression of fundamental loyalty, that if it were not for the author's profound conviction that the historic ideals of the Disciples of Christ are sound and true, and imperative for our times, he would hardly have taken pains to criticise a dogma which, it seems to him, obscures and hinders those ideals. It is because I have faith that the great majority of my readers will feel this way about it, that I send the book forth on its mission. C. C. M.

Chicago, June, 1914.

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I.

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL'S POSITION

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL was probably the ablest as he was also the most noted champion of the immersionist side of the baptism controversy in modern times. One of his most striking contributions to his side of the argument was his redaction of the New Testament in which he put the word "immerse" in every place where "baptize" occurs in the King James version. The sources from which he compiled this work were an original translation of the Gospels made by George Campbell, of Aberdeen, and similar translations of the Acts and Epistles by Doddridge and Macknight, respectively. These translations he brought together in 1826 and published them under the name of "The Living Oracles."

Mr. Campbell reserved to himself the right of placing in the text the renderings of other authorities in preference to Doctors Campbell, Doddridge and Macknight wherever he saw fit, retaining the rejected rendering in the margin or appendix. But few alterations of this sort were made, however, and these were mainly in the line of his announced purpose to cast into

plain English those terms which the common version had only transliterated from the Greek. He was determined that this work should be, as he says, "a pure English New Testament, not mingled with Greek words, either adopted or anglicised."

The conscientiousness and fidelity with which Mr. Campbell performed this service were matched only by his independence and courage. In his day it was a hazardous thing to call in question the infallibility of the King James version. The reverent freedom which he exercised in the execution of his task gives us an illustration of the comparatively modern attitude toward the Scriptures which this pioneer critic disclosed also in many other ways.

While conceding the great beauty and dignity of the King James version, he felt that it was ill-suited to give to the mind of his day an adequate understanding of the Word of God. Many of its words and phrases had become conventionalized, smooth-worn. The people were not getting at the meaning of the Bible, and the effect of many of its great statements was limited to a certain unctious sound which the words had taken on by much reading in public worship.

He believed, moreover, that a free rendering of the Scriptures into contemporary speech would greatly stimulate the reading of the

Bible and set the mind free from "slavish attachments to particular words and phrases which were supposed to favor party tenets." The reason there are so many parties in the Church of Christ, so many sects, he declared, is that we do not have a clear, plain translation of God's Word. Sects are built in large part on a misconception of the Scripture meaning and this misconception is more often than not due to a mistranslation, or an unclear translation, of the original text. The Bible was meant to be understood, he constantly affirmed, and if it is read naturally, without sectarian prejudice, just as other books are read, and in a correct translation, it is bound to be understood alike by all, at least in its essential teachings.

A more significant principle of interpretation, in insistence upon which Mr. Campbell stood quite alone in his day, was that of the necessity of taking into account the historical setting out of which a given book of Scripture arose. We cannot understand a book of the Bible, said Mr. Campbell, without knowing something of its date, its author, its author's circumstances and his purpose in writing. The conscious consistency with which Mr. Campbell applied the historical method in his treatment of the Scriptures—in the introductions which he wrote for each of the main divisions

of "The Living Oracles," and more especially in his treatment of the Old Testament—links him intimately with modern critical scholarship. A certain class of objections to Mr. Campbell urged by the orthodox of his day were much the same as those urged by some today against the so-called higher critics.

"The Living Oracles," however, proved a disappointment. It had a wide sale for a time among Mr. Campbell's own followers and was used by him and them even in public worship in many cases. But it was not favorably received either by the Baptist denomination, to which Mr. Campbell and his followers then belonged, or by the various bodies of pedo-baptists. And today it is found only in collections of old books preserved for historical purposes. In this indifferent reception the volume fell below its just deserts. In most respects it was an admirable and scholarly translation. It broke up the smooth-rubbed phrases and made the New Testament a new book to many. That its reception was limited to those who were Mr. Campbell's doctrinal followers is not, however, difficult to explain.

The substitution of "immerse" and its cognates for "baptize" and its cognates was part of Mr. Campbell's plan to give an actual translation of those words which, in the version before him and in the King James version, had

been merely transliterated from the Greek. The word "baptize" was one of these. Its Greek original was *baptizo*. The King James translators had simply taken it over bodily into the English text instead of rendering its meaning into an English term. Doctors George Campbell, Doddridge and Macknight followed the established procedure in their versions.

It was a bold stroke on Mr. Campbell's part to defy tradition and prejudice, and, in "The Living Oracles," translate the word *baptizo* throughout according to his convictions. He affirmed that previous translators had not dealt with this word according to their convictions, that the transliteration of the word was a compromise with custom and prejudice. He claimed that the whole world of scholarship was agreed on his translation. Many authorities were cited, among them Professor George Campbell himself, whose translation of the Gospels was a constituent part of "The Living Oracles." Professor Campbell was quoted as saying that the noun ought never to be rendered "baptism" or the verb "to baptize," though Mr. Campbell did not direct attention to the remainder of Professor Campbell's statement—"except when employed in relation to a religious ceremony." In this exception there is direct contradiction of Mr. Campbell's position.

It had been assumed by Mr. Campbell that the Presbyterian and Congregational affiliations of the three translators whose version formed the basis of "The Living Oracles" would give the volume a prestige among the pedo-baptist bodies which a version of Baptist origin could not be expected to command. But this "one improvement," as Mr. Campbell called his translation of *baptizo*, was a fly in the ointment to pedo-baptist readers, and rendered the whole volume unacceptable. On the other hand, much more to its editor's surprise, this same emendation proved to be an affront to Baptists also. While it sanctioned their view and practice of baptism by immersion only, it took away from the Scripture page the cherished name by which their denomination was known. In this version John was no longer "the Baptist" but simply "the Immerser." Logically, Mr. Campbell's translation of *baptizo* would compel the Baptists to change their name to the "Immersers," a thing which was, of course, intolerable.

Apart from its treatment of the baptism passages "The Living Oracles" was a most admirable book. Its scholarship was unexceptionable. In dignity, in perspicuity, in fidelity to the original text, this translation was superior to some of the versions that have since had wide vogue. Its general circulation would have

had a salutary and profound influence upon Christian thought. To cite one instance only: the term "kingdom of God" is rendered in this version "reign of God." This is every way an improvement over the common rendering, tending, as it does, to shake the conception loose from much of its legalism, emphasizing the inward fact of divine control and leaving imagination and experience to work out specific forms.

It would be difficult to maintain that the inhospitable reception accorded "The Living Oracles" was due to sheer sectarian prejudice. The very real need of a contemporary translation of the Scripture was too apparent, and the phenomenal popularity of a number of similar translations subsequent to the appearance of Mr. Campbell's volume indicate that there was widespread demand for just such a work as he purposed this to be. Moreover, its intrinsic merit in every other particular was such as would finally have overcome mere provincial antagonism to his treatment of the baptism passages had his treatment of these passages been indeed in harmony with scholarship and truth.

We do not hesitate to say that this work of Mr. Campbell would have become monumental had it not been for this single unscholarly flaw, namely, the repeated translation of a Greek word connoting a religious act, a social act, by

a word connoting only a physical act. There is significance in the fact that the Disciples themselves have been so little impressed with this *opus magnum* of their great leader.

After the controversy in connection with its first appearance had passed, the volume had but little sale. The fact is that the Disciples, less consciously, perhaps, than Baptists and pedobaptists, recoiled at the appearance on the very face of the Scripture of the word "immerse" in the place of "baptize." They, with their Baptist brethren, could make use of this construction of "baptize" in debate or in a denominational apologetic, but when they saw their favorite argument wrought into the very texture of the Bible itself, they could not overcome the feeling, ill-defined though it was, that some vital portion of the meaning of the sacred writing had been sacrificed.

When *immersion* was made the burden of the great Forerunner's preaching; when Peter was made to say to the Pentecostal converts, "Repent and be *immersed* for the remission of your sins;" and when Paul's mystical insight into the meaning of baptism was rendered: "So many of you as were *immersed* [in water] were immersed into Christ's death"—the incongruity of the new rendering was instinctively felt. And when it was put upon the lips of Christ to say, "He that believeth and is *im-*

mersed shall be saved," this feeling of incongruity passed into a silent protest.

Such a rendering could not find abiding place in the Christian consciousness, no more among Disciples and Baptists than among pedo-baptists. In debate with pedo-baptists the argument based upon such a rendering could perhaps be tolerated by immersionist advocates. Its bearing was not so clearly perceived. But when such a rendering appeared on the pages of the Scripture it was intuitively felt that something was wrong. It *must* be incorrect. Immersion, a physical act, is incommensurable with faith, with which it is here coupled. It is likewise incommensurable with salvation, of which it is here given as a condition. The Christ of the Gospels would not make an arbitrary physical act a condition of salvation. He could not in his last Commission contradict the teaching of his entire ministry. All this was but dimly felt, in a kind of subconscious way, and while with the lips and with the head the immersionist argument seemed to prevail, the heart would not consent to use a copy of the Scriptures on whose pages the logical results of the argument were frankly spread.

II.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD

THE translation of the Greek word *baptizo* by the English "immerse" in Mr. Campbell's edition of the Scriptures was a serious flaw in what otherwise was a work of scholarly distinction. It is not as a mere academic error that this mistranslation possesses significance enough to demand discussion in this late day, but because of its far-reaching consequences in the thought and practice of a great body of Christian people, and because his attempt to revise the text of the Scripture at this point brings out vividly the character of the dogma which the various denominations of Baptists and the Disciples cling to. Mr. Campbell's attempt to make baptism synonymous with immersion in water committed the Disciples of Christ, who justly looked to him as a great teacher and leader, to a theory of baptism utterly impossible for them consistently to practice, wholly contradictory to their fundamental conviction on Christian unity, and largely nullifying the constructive purpose of Thomas Campbell, the father of Alexander and the chief inspirer of the Disciples' movement.

In passing this judgment upon Mr. Campbell's position the reader must not infer that we are giving aid and comfort to his pedo-baptist opponents. The attempt to make *baptizo* mean "sprinkle" or "pour" has even less ground to sustain it than had Mr. Campbell's attempt to make it mean "immerse." In the literature of theological thought there are no more classic specimens of artful subterfuge and solemn trifling with facts than are found in the arguments of the pedo-baptist debaters who contended with Mr. Campbell that the Greek word meant "sprinkle" or "pour" as well as "immerse."

Had these debaters won their point they would have been no better satisfied with it than were the Baptists with their assumed victory. For if Mr. Campbell's version of the New Testament in which "immerse" regularly appeared instead of "baptize" was unsatisfactory to the whole Christian world, Baptist and pedo-baptist alike, equally unsatisfactory to pedo-baptists would have been a version in which "sprinkle" or "pour" appeared. The inadequacy of such a rendering would have been plain had some pedo-baptist debater published a version of the New Testament in which Peter is made to say, "Repent and be *sprinkled* every one of you for the remission of your sins," and in which Jesus is made to command his disci-

ples to "preach the gospel to every creature, *sprinkling* them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." No pedo-baptist would have endured such a translation. Such an attempt at carrying the affusionist argument right into the Scripture would have revealed to pedo-baptist debaters what Mr. Campbell's attempt revealed, namely, that baptism is neither affusion nor immersion, that the substitution of any English word denoting only a physical action for the word "baptize" involves a sacrifice of not only a part but the essential part of the meaning of the sacred text.

Mr. Campbell was more shrewd than his opponents in debate. He selected not only his own ground but theirs also. Denying that baptism meant immersion exclusively, he made them affirm that it meant sprinkling or pouring also. They had a vague idea of sprinkling, pouring and immersion being three *modes* of baptism, but not once did one of his opponents formulate just what the *thing itself* was which they argued could be administered by a plurality of modes. Had they done so they could easily enough have thrown the immersionist champion into confusion. But so long as they sought to find "sprinkle" and "pour" as well as "immerse" in *baptizo* they were at his mercy.

At this point the reader should be assured

that it is not within the scope of these chapters to include a technical discussion of the linguistic problem. It is far from our purpose to go over again the classic paths trodden by the controversialists. The lengthy citations from Hellenic Greek literature tending to show the meaning of the word *baptizo* have only a secondary interest for us. We regard the linguistic aspect of the baptism question as very simple. With the knowledge of certain facts it can be worked out by one unacquainted with the Greek language quite as conclusively as by a Greek scholar.

Indeed, the conviction which underlies our present study, and of the truth of which it is hoped to convince the reader, is that much of the dispute over the classic meaning of *baptizo* is quite irrelevant in determining its New Testament meaning. The appeal to the signification of *baptizo* in the classic Greek of any age does not settle anything with respect to its use in the New Testament. It is not safe to appeal to etymology in general for the meaning of a word. The question is: What is the meaning of the word right here, in this specific context? The meaning of a word depends upon actual use, not upon etymology, and the context with which we have to do in determining the meaning of Christian baptism is the New Testament itself, not classic literature.

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This is not to say that we have no interest whatever in the classic use of the word. But our interest in its classical use is academic. An induction of a hundred passages in general Greek literature in which *baptizo* is shown to mean "immerse" or its equivalent would not determine the meaning of the word as used in the New Testament, though of course such an induction might show *how* the word came to be used in its New Testament signification.

We have on our hands, then, a problem in English, not a problem in Greek. Average intelligence, a few easily obtainable facts of language and of history, and a moderately developed faculty of historical insight are all the equipment necessary to a thorough and independent understanding of the meaning of this Greek word in its New Testament use. If minds possessing this modicum of equipment differ in their conclusions, the reason must be found elsewhere than in the disparity of their scholarship. The baptism question is not a scholar's question any longer. It is a plain man's question. We depend upon scholarship, to be sure, for certain data, but these data are in this case practically undisputed. Without the slightest timidity, therefore, the humblest reader will be able to follow the brief discussion of this less interesting aspect of our problem, which will engage us only long enough to

gather up a few linguistic facts and principles bearing upon the meaning of *baptizo*.

This word is derived from the root word, *bapto*, whose simple and primitive meaning is to dip, to immerse. *Baptizo* is the intensive or frequentative form of *bapto* and means, primarily, to dip, to immerse, to dip repeatedly, to sink. The simple word *bapto* is not used in the New Testament in referring to baptism. It does occur in other connections, however, in both Old and New Testaments, and is nearly always translated "dip."

The difference between *bapto* and *baptizo*, in their primary meanings, is that the latter usually carries with it a more intense or heightened signification. *Bapto* expresses the simple, casual act of dipping. *Baptizo* means to dip deeper or longer or repeatedly, or it reflects emotion or purpose in the one dipping. It often means to put under and keep under, therefore to sink or drown. *Baptizo* is *bapto* underscored or in italics, so to speak. Except for this intensive difference the two words in their primary and radical import have identically the same meaning. Certainly there is no distinction in the *action* implied by both words. But because of this intensive quality of *baptizo* it lends itself more naturally than *bapto* to figurative use. Hence we find it used to signify "crush," "overwhelm," "intoxicate," "ruin,"

"drown," etc. In the figurative use of *baptizo* its root meaning or at least a suggestion of it is usually present.

But besides their primary and figurative use, it is a common phenomenon for words to branch out into new meanings through association, and to take into themselves a special or, as the scholars say, a "technical" signification. This new technical meaning may be totally unlike the primary meaning. It grafts itself on the old word and in the appropriate context is more essential than, and sometimes entirely displaces, the original connotation.

A clear example of this differentiation of meaning in the same word is afforded by the word *bapto,* which, besides its primary meaning, "dip," was also used to signify "to dye," "to color." A dyer was therefore called a "baptist," one who baptizes, that is, dyes. Now the fact that in a hundred instances *bapto* means "immerse" does not in the least demand that the word be translated "immerse" when it manifestly means "dye." "To dye" and "to immerse" are not synonyms. Their meanings are utterly incomparable. The radical use of *bapto* as "immerse" explains how it came also to mean "dye." As we have seen, the word originally and in its main usage signified the mode or act of immersing or dipping. From the fact that things were usually dyed by dipping them in

the colored liquid, the word was used to signify to dye by dipping. In time it was bound to be used to signify to dye *in any manner*. And as a matter of fact there are instances in which the garment is said to be baptized when the colored liquid is *dipped upon* the thing dyed. When the liquid drops upon the garments they are said to be baptized or dyed.

Defenders of affusion have used such instances to prove that *bapto* meant to pour or to sprinkle. Champions of immersion have assumed that they had conclusively answered this argument by tracing out the etymology of the word, showing that it originally meant "dip" or "immerse." Both arguments were irrelevant. The word in such a context means neither immerse nor sprinkle. It means dye. The Greek word originally denoting the particular process or action (immersing) by which the thing was dyed has taken into itself a new meaning, that of the effect (dyeing) produced by the action. In this new and special meaning of the word its original signification is practically disregarded.

The point that should be made clear by this illustration is that this special meaning of *bapto* as "dye" or "stain" is not present in the root of the word. It is a meaning that the word came to connote through association. It thus in that particular context practically lost its

original signification. So completely had the word in this its "technical" sense been differentiated from its original and still common meaning that it was even used to denote the smearing or rubbing of tawny ashes upon the face. Certainly in such usage there is no trace of the root meaning, "dip." Nor is it employed figuratively. Its use marks the definite transformation of the word's meaning in that particular connection.

III.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD
(Continued.)

LET it be remembered that we are referring to *bapto* and its special meaning as "dye" only for purposes of illustration. Its use in the sense of "dye" has no necessary connection with our discussion of the meaning of *baptizo*. There are many other illustrations we might have chosen, and two or three of these will be taken up farther on. There is an especial pertinency in the case of *bapto*, however, because if the root word itself could undergo a change so fundamental it will seem less strange if we shall find that the derivative word *baptizo* has undergone in a particular context an analogous specialization.

And this is precisely what happened to the word *baptizo* among the Jews in the time not long preceding the Christian era. Greek was the common language of the world at that time. Jews and Romans spoke it, as well as Hellenists. It was called *koina*, meaning that it was the speech common to all peoples. The Old Testament was used by the Jews in the Greek translation known as the Septuagint. *Baptizo*

is found twice in the Septuagint. Naaman is said to have "dipped himself seven times in the Jordan," and Isaiah makes his penitent say, "My iniquity overwhelms me." The Greek verb translated "dipped" and "overwhelms" is in each instance a form of *baptizo*. In the New Testament, apart from the more than one hundred cases in which it is transliterated "baptize," the word *baptizo* occurs five times and is translated by "wash" or "washing," referring definitely to the cleansings practiced by the Jews. In all these uses of *baptizo* it is manifestly employed to denote its primary meaning, to dip, or wash.

In the more than one hundred instances in which the term is transliterated—allowing for a few exceptions easily distinguished,—it connotes a definitely specialized meaning. We may call this its characteristic New Testament meaning, not because the New Testament writers alone so employed it, but because the New Testament is the most extensive body of literature to which we have access in which it appears with this connotation. Before the writers of the New Testament appeared on the scene the word *baptisma* was commonly used to denote the ceremony of initiation of a non-Jew into the Jewish state and church. This initiation was practiced by the total submersion of the proselyte's body in the water. At the

first the word *baptisma* no doubt applied only to the physical act by which the initiation was signalized. Gradually, however, the term gathered to itself the total psychical import of the ceremony or ordinance, and was used to denote not the physical part of the ceremony alone but the whole significance of the ceremony itself. The name of the sign had become the name of the thing signified. *Baptizo* came thus to have a technical or specialized meaning. To *baptize* a convert to Judaism meant thus to confer upon him the religious and political status of a Jew. The signification of the word is not rendered at all in such a context by translating it "immerse." The proselyte's "baptism" was administered by immersion in water, but the baptism was not the immersion. The whole meaning of the religious ceremony had grafted itself upon the word which primarily had meant only the physical act by which the ceremony was performed.

Thus *baptizo* had undergone among the Jews the same kind of differentiation which *bapto* had undergone in the dye shops of Greece. The latter word had taken into itself the total meaning of the process, dyeing, while it was originally used to denote only the physical action of the process, namely, dipping the raiment in the coloring fluid. From dipping it came to mean dye, and a dyer came to be called a "baptist."

Likewise from dipping *baptizo* came to mean initiate, and the performer of the ceremony of initiation was called a "baptist."

Whether the development of *baptizo* in this its technical meaning had, like *bapto*, gone so far as to practically drop or disregard its primary meaning is a question that may be considered farther on. For the present it will do to say that at the time of John the Baptist it is evident that the religious, the social—that is, the psychical—connotation of *baptizo* took precedence in the popular mind, and in John's mind, of the physical connotation. It is not improbable that when the word was spoken it called up to the mind along with its religious meaning the imagery of physical immersion, but this imagery was incidental and subordinate to the religious meaning.

We have been using the word "initiate" as the best English equivalent of this social or religious meaning of *baptizo*. This word, however, is not wholly satisfactory. It suggests to our mind somewhat more elaborate formalities than an accurate translation should convey. "Induct" is in this respect a better word. We have no single English word that expresses with complete precision the meaning of the Jewish use of *baptizo* at the time of John. Our difficulty is all the more marked when we come to the term in its full Christian signification.

There is in its full Christian sense an element of self-consecration which is not explicitly enough connoted by either "initiate" or "induct." Still further, under Paul's hand the word is given, as we shall see, an additional enrichment and heightening wholly unique.

The best reason, and the only true reason, for our English scholars not translating the word in their versions of the New Testament is that it could not be translated. "Sprinkle" has not an iota of justification. "Immerse" can be justified only by the most wooden and mechanical use of certain linguistic facts and a total disregard of obvious laws of translation and interpretation. "Purify" is inadequate and misleading. Its use would connect baptism historically with the ceremonial cleansings of the Jews, whereas it derives directly from the ceremony of conferring the Jewish status upon proselytes.* There is, we repeat, no English word that satisfies. The only course left our translators was to transliterate or transfer the word bodily into our language and allow us to fill it with such richness of meaning as its Scripture context and our Christian experience should yield.

And this is precisely what we have done.

*It is clear in each of the few cases in the New Testament where *baptizo* is used in referring to mere purification that it is used in its primary sense, to dip, to wash, and not in its specialized sense.

The word "baptize" has come to have to non-immersionist English-speaking Christendom the same meaning that *baptizo* had to the Jews and early Christians. It means induction into the Church and into Christ, carrying with it, in the case of adults actually and in the case of children potentially, the idea of inward self-commitment or consecration. In our common speech we do not think of so many *immersions* or so many *sprinklings* when we are informed as a piece of news that there were so many baptisms last Sunday. For the average mind the particular physical action by which the baptisms were signalized is quite incidental and probably disregarded. It is the social and personal import of the word that our minds grasp. We think of so many persons having come out from the world and taken membership in the Church of Christ.

In just this way, but with even less consciousness of the form as such—for there were no competing forms then—was *baptizo* used in the time of our Lord. It was a religious ceremony, an institutional function, not a mere specific physical action.

Before leaving this more or less technical part of our study it should be re-emphasized that the development which we have traced in the word *baptizo* and illustrated by a similar development in its root word *bapto* is not a

phenomenon peculiar to these words but one of the most commonplace observations of the habits of language. This remark is, of course, superfluous to the student of linguistic science, but may be of value to other readers. Previous discussions of the meaning of baptism have strangely overlooked the fact and even denied the possibility of such a differentiation taking place as we have traced. Mr. Campbell was among these.

In order to make our point more real to readers who may be unfamiliar with it, we introduce two words, one Greek the other Latin, which have undergone similar transformations. The Greek word *psallo* originally meant to "pick" or "pluck," a purely physical act. Later it came to mean to pluck the lyre; later to make music by plucking a stringed instrument; and finally it came to connote making music in any manner, including even "to sing." But all the while it kept its original meaning, "pluck," for appropriate contexts. We get our words "psalm" and "psalter" from it. "Singing and *making melody* in your hearts" is a New Testament clause, the Greek word for "making melody" being a form of *psallo*. In this technical or specialized sense the primary meaning of the word has entirely fallen away.

The Latin word *candidatus* illustrates the same common phenomenon of differentiated

meaning. Primarily it denoted one clothed in white. It became the custom for one who offered himself for public office in Rome to wear a white toga. Therefore he was called *candidatus,* a candidate. Later the custom of wearing white became obsolete, but the name continued to be applied to the aspirant for office, even though in this connection it had entirely lost its primary signification. It has been taken over bodily into our language just as *baptizo* was taken over. To demand that we substitute its primary meaning for its specialized meaning would be manifestly absurd. No less absurd, however, is the demand that "immerse" be substituted in our language for "baptize."

We must not take space to multiply cases of this sort. They are so common that it is astounding Mr. Campbell and immersionists generally could have overlooked their existence and even denied their possibility. In another chapter we shall close our study of this linguistic aspect of the problem by a critical examination of the assumptions in Mr. Campbell's argument.

IV.

MR. CAMPBELL'S ASSUMPTIONS

CAREFUL reading of Alexander Campbell's utterances on baptism will disclose three assumptions upon which he builds his entire defense of the immersion dogma. They are:

1. That a word always retains its root meaning in all its forms and in every context.

2. That *baptizo* in the New Testament is a word of specific action.

3. That all scholarly authorities justify him in translating *baptizo* by "immerse" in the New Testament.

Each of these assumptions is erroneous.

1. The first assumption is one that we have been considering in the two previous chapters. We have already before us data enough to justify our astonishment at such a statement as the following from Mr. Campbell: "According to the usages of all languages, ancient and modern, derivative words legally inherit the specific meaning of their natural progenitors, and *never can so far alienate from themselves* that particular significance as to indicate any action different from that intimated in the par-

ent stock." In the followng statement the italics are Mr. Campbell's: *"Wherever the radical syllable* ("dip" or *bap*) *is found the radical idea is in it."*

Mr. Campbell conceived some "law" to obtain which held words to a certain logical course of usage. But there is no such "law." The meanings of words are not governed by a determinate principle or law. They mean what they are meant to mean by those who use them. Their meanings are often accidental, even capricious. It was purely capricious that *bapto* should have come to mean "dye," that *candidatus* should have come to mean an aspirant for public office. This assumption that words retain their root meaning throughout their entire usage is purely fictitious.

Instances could be multiplied indefinitely to substantiate this point. But we shall limit ourselves to those illustrations that have already been given. In the case of *psallo,* as we have seen, there is a clear refutation of Mr. Campbell's first assumption. This word's meaning was the specific physical action, "pluck," or "pick." In its specialized use as "sing," or "making melody" in your hearts, there is no trace whatever of its root meaning. The word actually did what Mr. Campbell said a word could not do, namely, "alienated from itself" its primary meaning and took to itself a mean-

ing "specifically different from that intimated in the parent stock." In the case of *bapto* it has been shown that Mr. Campbell's position expressed so positively in the italicized statement given above is erroneous. This word we have found used as "dye" or "stain" in contexts where no hint of its primary meaning, "dip," is present.

But the most convincing evidence against this assumption of Mr. Campbell is found in the actual use of the word *baptizo* itself two or three centuries after Christ. As is well known, it was at about that time that sprinkling or pouring was introduced as a substitute for immersion in administering baptism. Greek was then the common language of the Church, just as common as in the time of Christ. But this ceremony in which water was poured upon a person was called *baptisma.*

Here was a Greek-speaking people to whom, according to Mr. Campbell's argument, *baptizo* meant "dip" or "immerse," and yet they apply the word to a ceremony in which there is no trace or hint of dipping. Such a procedure would have been impossible. We cannot imagine one who speaks English pouring a little water on another's head and saying, "I *immerse* you into the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit!" Manifestly the word *baptizo* did not mean "immerse" to the Greek-speaking Church

of the third and fourth centuries. It connoted the rite of induction into the Church, a rite whose essential meaning was found elsewhere than in the particular physical act by which it was solemnized.

This use of *baptizo* at the time the form of administration began to be corrupted both refutes Mr. Campbell's assumption as to the immutability of a word's meaning and establishes our contention that *baptizo* in its Christian and New Testament context stood for the total social act of conferring the new religious status.

2. The second assumption of Mr. Campbell's, that *baptizo* is a word of specific action, demands but little attention in view of what has already been said. He illustrates his point by citing "go" as an example of "generic" action. "Creep," "run," "walk," "ride," etc.—these are all "specific" actions, particular forms of "going." *Baptizo,* Mr. Campbell said, signifies a specific action, "dip."

This, of course, is true, if we confine ourselves to the primary meaning of the word. But when once it is admitted that words take on different meanings in new circumstances it is fallacious to reason from the meaning of the word in its primary signification. We have seen in the cases of *bapto, psallo* and *candidatus* how specific words may become generic in their usage. Whether *baptizo* in its New Tes-

tament usage entirely lost its primary specific meaning, "dip," or not is a question whose answer must wait upon our examination of the actual New Testament texts. But that there is nothing in the so-called "laws" of language to prevent its becoming wholly generic the illustrations we have adduced amply prove.

3. There remains now to be considered the assumption concerning the confirmatory support which Mr. Campbell conceives the scholarship of the world to give him in his translation of *baptizo*. There is something very naive and yet very shrewd in the way Mr. Campbell and all Baptist controversialists quote the "scholarship of the world" on their side. One cannot help wondering how these scholars, the great majority of whom are pedo-baptists, can go right on practicing affusion if they are on the Baptist side of the controversy!

The fact is that on the vital point of the argument the scholars quoted by Mr. Campbell are not on the Baptist side. Baptist controversialists have a way of overlooking the most important utterances of the authorities they quote. They also have a shrewd way of reading their own position into the silences of these scholars.

Scholars generally agree to two points made by Mr. Campbell and the immersionists—that the root meaning of *baptizo* was "immerse" and that, as a matter of historic fact, baptism

was solemnized in New Testament times by immersion. But on the point that *baptizo* in its characteristic New Testament meaning signifies "immerse" and refers to the specific physical act by which converts were initiated into the Church and not to the initiation itself, these scholars are either silent or opposed. We must not review the scores and scores of quotations which Mr. Campbell gives. It will suffice our present purpose to examine his quotations from the three scholars whose translations together constitute "The Living Oracles"—Doctors George Campbell, Doddridge and Macknight. The following quotations are given by Mr. Campbell:

Dr. Doddridge says, "Baptism was generally *administered by* immersion, though I see no proof that it was essential to the *institution.*" On Romans 6:4 he says, "It seems the part of candor to confess that here is an allusion to the manner of *baptizing by immersion* as most usual in these early times."

Dr. Macknight says, "In baptism, *the rite of initiation* into the Christian Church, the baptized person is buried under the water."

Dr. George Campbell says, "The noun ought never to be rendered 'baptism,' nor the verb 'to baptize,' *except when employed in a religious ceremony.*" In addition to these we may also give a quotation from Professor Stuart of Andover,

of whom Mr. Campbell speaks in the highest praise. He quotes him as follows: "For myself, then, I cheerfully admit that *baptizo* in the New Testament, *when applied to the rite of baptism,* does in all probability *involve the idea* that this rite was usually performed by immersion, but not always."

We do not give these quotations here on account of the possible exceptions to immersion in early practice which they suggest. Those exceptions we regard as extremely unlikely. Our purpose now is to draw the reader's attention to the fact that these authorities, on whom Mr. Campbell leaned, evidently regarded the New Testament word *baptizo* as referring not to the physical act of immersion, or to any other specific physical act, but to the rite, the institutional function, of initiation, and that they would have regarded the translation of the word by "immerse" as emptying it of its essential meaning. We have put the italics into the quotations to aid in making this clear.

Mr. Campbell entirely overlooked this implication of almost all his authorities. He assumed that, having obtained their admission that the root meaning of *baptizo* was "immerse" and that the historic practice of baptism employed immersion, he could then substitute the word "immerse" for "baptize" in the Great Commission and throughout the New Testament. But

he does not quote, to our knowledge, a single non-Baptist authority for this procedure. The scholarly authorities on whom he relies all imply by their statements that the word meant much more and something different in its characteristic New Testament use than simply "immerse."

How Mr. Campbell and other Baptist disputants could have overlooked this very vital point is hard to explain. But the time has fully come when immersionist writers should be compelled to exercise greater modesty in their claim as to the attitude of "the scholarship of the world."

V.

THE EARLY MODE OF ADMINISTERING BAPTISM

THUS far we have considered certain linguistic principles and facts which have become a large part of the subject-matter of the controversy over baptism. We have found no "law" of language to sustain the immersionist contention that the Greek word *baptizo* when used in the context in which the New Testament employs it must possess its primary or root meaning of "immerse" or "dip." On the contrary, we have found this word taking on changed meanings in particular circumstances through association. Our appeal to linguistic scholarship has shown that this word in its New Testament use refers to a rite, a ceremony, including in its connotation the *significance* of the ceremony and not merely the physical act by which the ceremony was carried out. The essential significance of the ceremony, its function and meaning, as nearly as our English terms can state it may be expressed as initiation or induction into a religious order, carrying with it also the ideas of consecration and moral cleansing.

The pivotal fallacy of the immersionist dogma may be stated thus: It has allowed this functional content to drop out of the meaning of the word *baptizo* and has retained only the physical act by which this essential function was performed. The word, however, in its New Testament usage, as we will see yet more clearly when we come to an examination of the Scripture text itself, refers primarily to the function of initiation and only incidentally to the particular physical act. In a later chapter we shall consider this distinction of function and form more fully. At the present let us ask as to the origin and early mode of administering the rite called baptism.

Quite outside of Christian or Hebrew influence we find that water is used for ritualistic purposes by many peoples, both savage and civilized. The ceremonial use of water is common in the case of tribal initiations of various sorts, and especially at the birth of children. Why the identical element, water, should be chosen by many unconnected races is not strange. "The animistic theory of the world which underlies all primitive religions suggested that water was a living being, which, in so far as it assisted the processes of growth and aided men in other ways might be presumed to be beneficent."

The same magical view of water was probably arrived at also by practical experience. The

cleansing and refreshing effect of water in its ordinary use made it natural for the primitive mind to impute to it also an efficacy in removing ceremonial tabu, or curing physical disease, or, in higher orders of society, freeing the soul from moral guilt. Thus certain streams and pools came to be regarded as possessing peculiar magical powers. The laver of the Hebrews is a common symbol in most religions. The various washings appointed in the Old Testament and greatly elaborated in later Judaism find their analogy in the religions of most peoples—Asiatic, early European, and most primitive races. Among the Greeks ceremonial bathing had its place in the initiatory rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The detailed directions found in the Old Testament for the use of water in purifying one who had been polluted by touching a dead body or a Gentile or a leprous person or what not, may be assumed to be familiar to the reader. In the period immediately prior to the Christian era these ceremonies became yet more strict and elaborate. The Pharisees exalted such washings as possessing some almost inherent virtue for bringing man into favor with God. They had received them from their elders and guarded them with superstitious zeal. For example, after a visit to the market place they would not eat until they had first purified them-

selves by ceremonial washings, lest perchance they had touched a Gentile. Their whole life was hedged about with rules for ceremonial purifications.

The attempt is often made to identify Christian baptism with this ceremonial purification. This is to miss the distinctive and essential meaning of baptism. They are alike in that both use water, and that both suggest moral cleansing. They are unlike in that baptism confers a new status upon the one baptized, and this conferment of the new status is the very essence of the meaning of baptism. Besides, purification was accomplished by various uses of water—bathing, pouring, sprinkling, etc., while baptism was administered mainly, if not always, by immersion.

Reference is here made to these lustrations of the Jews and other peoples, not for the purpose of explaining the origin and meaning of Christian baptism thereby, but to suggest how natural it was that the particular physical act of immersion in water came to be employed as the formal sign of the baptismal act, and thus also to suggest how the initiating ceremony itself came to be called baptism.

The direct prototype of Christian baptism is found not in the numerous lustrations and cleansings of Jewish daily ceremony, but in the rite by which converts from among the

Gentiles were initiated into the Jewish politico-religious state. The Old Testament prescribes no form for the initiation of proselytes, for the simple reason that it was not until later Judaism that proselytizing became common. But with the downfall of the secular splendor and independence of the nation its corporate enthusiasm and faith found expression in making converts to the Jewish cult. The zeal with which this propaganda was prosecuted is indicated by Jesus' saying, "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte."

As a result of this intense evangelistic activity and its abundant fruitage a well defined ritual for the induction of converts grew up. This ritual was three-fold, consisting of circumcision, immersion in water and the offering of a sacrifice. Of these three, immersion came to be the distinctive formal sign of initiation. Sacrifice was the common duty of all Jews, and was abolished, in connection with proselyte induction, after the temple was destroyed. Circumcision would apply to male converts only, and most of the proselytes were women. Therefore immersion came to stand out as the distinguishing act of initiation, and the term, *baptizo,* denoting at first only the physical act,—one of the series of acts in the initiating ceremonies,—gradually gathered into itself the entire social and religious significance of initia-

tion or induction into the new community.

The sign gave its name to the thing signified.

According to the Talmud, the procedure in proselyte baptism was as follows: Three of those who had instructed the "stranger" in the law became his "fathers" or sponsors and took him to a pool in which he stood up to his neck in water, while the great commandments of the law were recited to him. These he promised to keep, then a benediction was pronounced, and he plunged beneath the water, taking care to be entirely submerged.

This was the naturalization ceremony of Judaism, by which a Gentile became a Jew. In comparison with the divers washings to which all Jews were accustomed, it shows at once a likeness and a striking difference. All the significance of cleansing or purification which belonged to these washings was possessed also by baptism. If one who belonged to the house of Israel needed purification from specific contact with pollution, or from even the mere possibility of such contact, much more does one who has spent his whole life in the midst of Gentile uncleanness need a thorough and complete cleansing before he can enjoy the privileges of his new status. These ceremonial washings, however, were merely casual, not so solemn and formal as baptism. They rarely, if ever, in-

volved complete submersion, though certain of them called for bathing the entire body. They were often repeated. Baptism was once for all.

Purification was a specific act of one who is already a member of the Jewish community.

Baptism was the unique act of initiation into that community.

The prevalence of this custom of initiating converts by immersing them in water is the explanation of the silence in the New Testament as to the specific manner in which baptism was administered. The early readers of the New Testament did not need instruction as to the practice of baptism. The procedure was quite as well established as is the ceremony of "being sworn" among us. All men know that in this ceremony they are expected to remove their hat and raise their right hand. So John preaches baptism without once indicating to the people in what manner he intends that it shall be solemnized, and Peter commands that the people repent and be baptized, but no word is left us to indicate by what outward form baptism was administered to the three thousand who obeyed him that day. Neither preacher nor people were thinking primarily of the physical act by which their baptism was to be administered; they were thinking of the baptism itself, the induction into the new order.

Yet there can hardly be a reasonable doubt

that immersion was the mode of administering baptism employed by John and by the early Church. The very silence of the record in view of the facts above recited concerning proselyte baptism would seem to indicate that any novel procedure was extremely unlikely. The people were accustomed to initiation by immersion. Nothing would be more natural than for a new religious movement or order to adopt, involuntarily, the established and common formality of initiating its converts. Hence we find John "baptizing in Aenon near to Salem because there was much water there." It is much more probable that the "much water" was needed for the baptismal ceremony than for drinking purposes for man and beast, as partizan defenders of affusion strive to make out.

Wherever circumstantial allusions to the administration of baptism are found in the New Testament they will be seen to fit naturally into the assumption that the form by which proselytes were baptized was carried over into the Christian Church. The formality by which Jesus' baptism was solemnized was manifestly an immersion. He went down into the water and came up out of the water. Philip's procedure with the eunuch was the same. By association of ideas Paul reads into the outward act of immersion the symbolism of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

It would be too much to say dogmatically that baptism was not administered in New Testament times in any way save by immersion. Two instances upon which affusionists lean heavily —one the baptism of the three thousand, the other the baptism of the Philippian jailer—are open to conjecture, it must be admitted. Yet as to the first it is scarcely less difficult to account for the pouring or sprinkling than for the immersion of so many on one day. And the difficulty in the way of the immersionist interpretation of the case of the jailer is not insuperable.

There is but a single text in the New Testament whose wording seems to hint at anything other than immersion. This is Peter's inquiry at the house of Cornelius, "Can any man forbid water that these should be baptized?" The natural inference from such a sentence, taken abstractly, would be that water was the movable quantity in the situation, to be brought in or forbidden, i. e., withheld, as those to whom the question was addressed might indicate. This inference, of course, would support the affusionist theory that the water was to be applied to the person rather than the immersionist theory that the person was to be applied to the water. With respect to this text, it is not seemly to be dogmatic. Assuming, however, that immersion was the universal practice, it is still not unnatural

that one should speak as did Peter, intending to sharpen the antithesis between the Holy Spirit which they had so manifestly received and the much less significant formal initiation which Jewish prejudice might forbid. At any rate, with the background of pre-Christian practice in initiating proselytes and the clear implications of the remainder of the New Testament allusions, it is much more reasonable to interpret this indecisive passage on the side of immersion than to build upon so scant a foundation a theory with which the great body of our data is not in accord.

Of the very few references to baptism in the post-apostolic literature, we may quote first from Justin Martyr where he describes explicitly the manner of baptizing in the middle of the second century. He says:

"I will now declare unto you also after what manner we, being made new by Christ, have dedicated ourselves to God. As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us to a place where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then received the washing with water. For Christ also said except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. * * * That he may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again,

and has repented of his sins, the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe; he who leads to the laver the person that is to be washed calling him by this name alone. * * * And this washing is called illumination. * * * He who is illuminated is washed."

There are many interesting comments suggested by this extract. It betrays the strong influence of Greek ideas upon Christian thought. It marks a considerable growth of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. But the quotation is introduced here simply as another evidence of the common practice of administering baptism by an immersion or washing. It is true that the immersion is not specifically described, but the circumstantial details warrant the inference that it was the mode used.

We may now consider one other quotation, from a still earlier source than Justin's Apology, namely, the so-called "Didache" or "The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles." This writing is placed by critical scholars at about 100 A. D. Dr. Philip Schaff says of it, " 'The Didache' has the marks of the highest authority and is one of the oldest, if not the very oldest, of the post-apostolic writings. There is nothing in it which could not have been written between A. D. 70 and 100." It contains much instruction for the conduct of the ceremonial and public acts of the church. Its author is not known. On baptism the "Didache" says:

"Now, concerning baptism, thus baptize ye; having first uttered all these things baptize unto the name of

the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if thou hast not living water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water upon the head thrice, into the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before baptism let the baptizer and the baptized fast, and whatever others can; but the baptized thou shalt command to fast for one or two days before."

"We have here," says Harnack, "the oldest evidence of the permission of baptism by aspersion. It is especially important also that the author betrays not the slightest uncertainty as to its validity. The evidences for an early occurrence of aspersion were hitherto not sufficiently certain, either in respect to their date, as in the pictorial representations, or in respect of their conclusiveness; doubt is no longer possible."

There are two reasons for introducing this quotation from this oldest post-apostolic writing. First, as a confirmation of our position that baptism or initiation into the Church was performed in the early days by immersion, and secondly, because it suggests the loose, customary and relatively unconscious way in which the particular physical act was held. Baptism so far from being identified with immersion in the mind of the early Church, is here shown to have been regarded as an organic function, in the administration of which the particular mode was not the essential matter.

Manifestly, even at this early date there had

been a certain amount of variation from the practice of immersion. Perhaps convenience would account in some measure for this variation; perhaps the earlier distinction between the ordinary ceremonial washings for purification and the baptism of a proselyte administered by immersion had become blurred as Christianity left Judaism farther and farther behind; perhaps contact with pagan washings had suggested the variation. However it came about, the fact cannot be gainsaid that in some degree, probably very slight, there were, ten years after the death of the apostle John, variations from the mode of baptism as administered by John the Baptist and the apostolic Church.

It is inconceivable that this variation could have occurred had baptism and immersion meant the same thing in the minds of the apostles or in the mind of the Lord. If the word *baptizo,* which belonged to the common speech of this Greek-speaking age, had meant "immerse" or "dip," as Baptists and Disciples have confidently taught, the author of the "Didache" would have made himself ridiculous by advising that immersion could be performed by pouring water on the head thrice! Manifestly, the Greek word did not mean "immerse." It denoted the rite of becoming a member of the Church. Had the particular physical act by which the rite should be administered been a

matter of whose grave importance the early Church was as consciously aware as the modern immersion dogma assumes, it could not possibly have undergone any variation whatever without a protest which would have registered itself plainly in the literature of that age.

Instead of these variations raising a protest, a storm of controversy, they were accepted as a matter of course, or mildly corrected. The writer of the "Didache" refers to no divine authority for immersion, as he would naturally have done had it been conceived that this particular physical act was the subject of divine legislation. He rather puts the whole matter on the basis of tradition or propriety. This injunction as to the preëminence of immersion is one indication out of many of a growing punctiliousness upon the part of the Church leaders with respect to form. This writer would standardize immersion, so to speak. There are occasions, he allows, when affusion will do, but these should be regarded as exceptions.

We find in these and other post-apostolic references to baptism the beginnings of a different point of view from that with which the ordinance was regarded in the New Testament. There is a consciousness of the mode as such, and a sensitiveness to the minutiae of its performance. The New Testament is apparently unconcerned for the externals of the rite. It

speaks in broad, simple terms of baptism, the induction into the new relationship; refers incidentally to the fact that the element with which the ceremony is performed is water, and never introduces a hint that would deflect attention from the spiritual and social significance which the rite denotes. The particular physical act is not stressed. The externals of the ceremony do not seem to be pressed into the forefront of consciousness in any New Testament reference. In John's mind and the people's, in Jesus' mind and the apostles', and in the thought of the early Church, the important thing was baptism itself. The mode, immersion, by which it was carried out, was historically accidental, a matter of custom, possessing precisely the significance that is possessed by any one of a hundred other symbols by which social and religious acts are signalized. The physical act was not a question of conscience, hardly a question of consciousness. It did not belong in any vital sense to essential Christianity. It was not put into Christianity by Christ; it was brought to Christianity by the people to whom Christ first offered his gospel. He accepted it just as he accepted other forms of custom and of thought, and used them where they would aid in his spiritual enterprise.

VI.

MAGICAL AND LEGALISTIC VIEWS.

IN PREVIOUS chapters we have been discovering the meaning of the word "baptize" and the form by which baptism was administered in the early Church. We turn now from a consideration of the linguistic and historical aspects of the subject to the important interpretative task of determining the meaning of the baptismal act itself. In this and the two following chapters it will be our purpose to define the function of baptism in its relation to the Church as a social institution. After that there will remain the more enjoyable task of restudying the Scripture texts bearing upon the baptism problem.

Much of the confusion of thought with respect to baptism is due to the fact that the ordinance has become isolated from the social institution from which its meaning is derived, and has been assumed to possess a meaning on its own account. In New Testament times the ordinance was the simple, customary ceremony of initiation into a religious order. In Christianity it was the act of being initiated into the Church of Christ. It possessed the significance attach-

ing to any rite of initiation, namely, it was a device of good order, a means of social control. The people were not conscious of *it*,—least of all were they conscious of the particular physical act by which it was administered—but they were conscious of what the rite *implied*. The New Testament writers give us neither an account of its origin nor an explanation of its meaning. All their references take for granted that it was an already existing custom whose meaning was well understood. As a consequence of their silence the opinion widely prevails, more or less vaguely, especially among immersionists, that the ceremony of baptism was given by a special divine dispensation. In the controversy that has been waged over it it has been treated as a sort of Melchisedeck among social institutions, without origin and without genealogy.

Taken thus by itself, abstracted from its simple functional connection with the Church organization, the ordinance can be made to mean almost anything, according to the philosophy or fancy of the interpreter. The various unreal and often unethical doctrines concerning baptism that have been exploited throughout the history of the Church have been made possible by this lack of historical perspective and social insight. The social situation within which baptism arose and for which it has a natural mean-

ing has been forgotten. The mere bringing to mind of that actual social situation should do more than any argument to disclose the utterly fictitious character of the many dogmas with which the simple ceremony has been overgrown.

The recognition of baptism as a function of religious organization suggests that it be interpreted as any other social fact or factor is interpreted. Such an interpretation might be called sociological, in contrast to the dogmatic interpretations. There are two outstanding dogmatic views, which may be classified as the magical and the legalistic. Before discussing the sociological, or functional, view it will be well to wipe the slate clean of both these dogmatic interpretations.

1. To the magical conception of baptism we need give but little attention. This is the view upon which the doctrine of baptismal regeneration rests. Quite early in Church history an intrinsic potency came to be imputed to the act of baptism. It was taken out of its position as a social ceremony of initiation into the fellowship of Christ's followers and endowed with a virtue on its own account.

It was natural that baptism should have fallen victim to just this abuse. It stood on the border-line between the old life and the new, and came even to be designated by the very term "regeneration." The objective ceremony was

invested with all the efficacy which had in the early days attached to the inward spiritual qualities of faith and repentance. The growth of the doctrine that there was no salvation outside the Church, taken with the doctrine of original sin and the consequent practice of infant baptism, raised the ordinance into a place of magical potency. The point was reached where it was even frankly confessed that baptism might be efficacious without faith.

This view of baptism reached its logical development in the imposition of the rite upon uninstructed heathen whom the armies of the Christians conquered in battle.

The doctrine of baptismal regeneration is thoroughly magical and superstitious. The physical act of immersion in the water is regarded as efficacious. Tertullian, one of the Church fathers, gives an explanation of the magical potency of the water after this fashion: There was from the beginning a special affinity between water and the Spirit which had brooded over it at the Creation; the same spirit returns to the water if God be invoked and gives to it the power to impart sanctification.

All such magic as this has been historically rejected by our Protestant Christianity and may, therefore, be here dismissed without further discussion.

2. The legalistic conception of baptism must

detain us at somewhat greater length. This view of baptism is held mainly by those who identify the rite with the physical act of immersion and see in it what they call a "positive" command of Christ. It is contended that the word "baptize" in the New Testament should be translated flatly by "immerse" or its equivalents. The command of Jesus to "baptize" all nations means, therefore, nothing more nor less than to immerse them in water.

The legalistic view elevates baptism to the same relative position given it by the magical doctrine of baptismal regeneration, but tries to guard itself against a magical interpretation, first by insisting that the performance has no value except when preceded by faith and repentance and, secondly, by lodging the saving potency not in the water or the ceremony as such but in the divine will which has ordained immersion as a test of the soul's loyalty and faith. Baptism (immersion) is an institution of the Lord's own appointment and submission to it is the initial and typical act in which the soul yields to his authority.

Among certain types of immersionists holding this view obedience to Christ consists chiefly, so far as the weight of their explicit emphasis goes, in being immersed. Faith, repentance and baptism, the formula of conversion commonly in use by the Disciples of Christ, is of-

ten varied in their speech by faith, repentance and *obedience*. Obedience is tacitly assumed to be synonymous with baptism. Not a little of the passion that Baptists and Disciples have thrown into their preaching of the Lordship of Christ—a theme very common in both bodies—has been due to the pragmatic use to which that doctrine lends itself in the enforcement of immersion as the supreme act of obedience.

Thus, while guarding against the magical elements in the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, the legalistic conception makes baptism still more abstract than does the magical view. Legalism reaches the farthest limit in the process of isolating this simple rite from its functional connection with the Church. In the magical view the ordinance still performs the function of initiation. The magical view is never held as purely magical; the magic is always mixed with the idea that baptism is potent because it brings one inside the Church. The Church is the big factor, and membership in it is the ultimate guarantee of salvation.

But in the legalistic view the isolation of baptism is complete. It is not a means to a concrete end. It has no human, social meaning. It is an item in a transaction between God and the soul, and this transaction takes place *in abstracto*.

While it is true that many who hold this view of baptism believe also that those who are bap-

tized are *ipso facto* members of the Church, yet the conception of baptism as initiation into the Church is not put forward. The ordinance is enjoined upon the convert as an act of inherent obedience to Christ, complete in itself. In sermons on baptism converts are not told to join the Church, to be initiated into the order of those who are striving to follow Christ. They are told to obey Christ *in this ordinance.* Their loyalty and the genuineness of their faith are tested by the Lord's assumed command to be immersed.

With this emphasis upon baptism as an abstract institution of personal obedience, it is not strange that among Disciples and Baptists a ceremony known as the "Right Hand of Fellowship" has been invented to take the place from which baptism has been pushed by this legalistic theory. Lacking its symbolism, the so-called Right Hand of Fellowship comes nearer answering to the baptism of the New Testament than does baptism as interpreted by its legalistic advocates.

The mode of reasoning by which the legalistic view sustains itself is substantially as follows: There is no conceivable reason for being baptized (immersed) except the fact that Christ commands it. Baptism, therefore, is a sheer test of submission to the divine will, and in this is its essential virtue. If instead of baptism

Christ had commanded his disciple to give a loaf of bread to a hungry child, such an act would not have tested the disciple's loyalty, for he could see some reason in the act and feel some human prompting to perform it. But baptism rests sheerly upon Christ's authority, and to submit to it is, therefore, a pure act of obedience, unalloyed by any human feeling or moral insight.

The kind of moral character that this conception imputes to Christ is, of course, obvious to every reader, and its crass legalism is repugnant to every soul that has thought its way far into the mind of the Master. The implications of such an apologetic for baptism might have been tolerated among the medieval schoolmen who were more intent upon logical than ethical consistency in the things of their religion. But that such a view could circulate in our own day in face of the profoundly significant discoveries of the moral teaching of Jesus to which we are accustomed is startling. Nevertheless this view is boldly exploited as a ruling motive in much of the evangelism of the Disciples of Christ.

In a religious paper widely read among Disciples the following statement recently appeared which registers the marvelous surviving power of a dogma which the genius of modern Christianity indignantly rejects:

A man may think that he believes, but his faith may not be strong enough to stand the test to which it will constantly be put in the Christian life. So, by the simple act of Christian baptism, his faith is tested in the very beginning. Man says: I believe. God says: Well, I will see if you do; be baptized! Man may say that he believes, but that is in his own heart, and the world cannot see it. Let him adequately express, embody, his faith before the world, let him illustrate his creed, by being baptized.

The story of Naaman's final submission to the prophet's arbitrary command to wash in Jordan seven times and the ringing rebuke administered by Samuel to King Saul for disobedience to the letter of his instructions furnish protagonists of this dogma with texts for many a sermon on the importance of exact obedience to Christ's un-understood command to be immersed.

This abstract treatment of baptism has produced a phenomenon in Protestant Christianity, especially in immersionist churches, entirely without analogy in the Church of New Testament days. These modern churches have developed a *baptism consciousness*. Their ministers argue and urge the duty of baptism. There is much preaching on the subject. The vast dynamic of the Lordship of Christ is put back of the sheer physical act of being immersed in water, investing it, theoretically, with awful importance. As a "test" of loyalty to Christ, souls are challenged to submit to it to prove

their mettle. Responding to such an appeal, the candidate tends to carry with him into the baptismal water a fictitious heroism, an over-consciousness of baptism, as such, and an under-consciousness of the implications of the spiritual status which it confers. The creation of this baptism consciousness by these motives inevitably tends to eclipse the free insight of the soul into the great moral principles of Christ's gospel. To the mind that can regard immersion in water as a *typical* command of Christ, his ethical laws of brotherhood usually sound thin and vague.

Now this baptism consciousness is totally without precedent in primitive Christianity. The apostles did not preach baptism: they preached Christ and baptized those who accepted him, with as little consciousness of the formality as such as we now put into the ceremony of the right hand of fellowship. Immersion as a specific act was not an important element of consciousness at all, either with preachers or converts. It was taken for granted. It had neither dogmatists nor critics. No questions were raised concerning it. The important content of consciousness was Christ and his salvation from sin unto holiness. After faith in Christ and repentance, the point at which moral heroism came in was not in submission to immersion as an arbitrary "positive" command, but

in the decision to attach oneself, in the face of the community, to the company of those who were already Christ's disciples.

The test of faith and loyalty was not in immersion but in the thing immersion implied—the willingness to assume the status of a member of Christ's Church. The command to be baptized voiced by Peter at Pentecost and by Ananias to Saul was not a command to perform a specific physical act (though custom had made the specific physical act well understood by both speaker and hearers) but to decisively commit themselves to the Christian community and accept induction into its fellowship. Baptism *was* this commitment, this induction.

In its original and natural setting Christian baptism was not an institution on its own account; it derived its significance from the Church, of which it was the gate of entrance, the initiatory ceremony. Its meaning was not inherent in itself or in an arbitrary divine decree by which it was appointed; it was an institution *of the Church,* and drew all the meaning it possessed from the Church. It was the door into the Church and, like a door, its meaning consisted in the function it performed in the larger whole of which it was an auxiliary part.

In justice to the Disciples of Christ, to whose evangelism reference has just been made, it

must be said that the legalistic type of teaching in its crasser forms is obsolescent among them, except in unprogressive communities. But the fundamental error lying behind such teaching abides with us still, namely, that baptism, in the sense of immersion, is an act whose sanction rests upon the sheer authoritative command of Christ. The rite is still dissociated from its original and natural setting.

It is important that the whole legalistic fiction concerning baptism be displaced by the plain, rational, social sanctions for it, so that our hearts may be able to discern what the commands of our Lord really are. Only in a functional view of baptism can our thought be saved from exaggeration and unreality.

VII.

THE FUNCTIONAL VIEW OF BAPTISM

BAPTISM is a function of the social organ of religion—the Church; it is not an independent, isolated institution, with a meaning inherent in itself. Its whole meaning is derived from the Church, in whose organized activity it performs a particular service. It is proper to speak of it as an institution at all only if one keeps in mind this its auxiliary character.

We are justified in taking baptism out of magical and legalistic classifications and interpreting it in sociological terms because the Church itself is a social institution and interpretable therefore in sociological terms. Whatever else is to be said about the Church—and much else is to be said—it will hardly be denied that it is a social institution, standing side by side in the social order with other institutions—the state, the home, the school. That is to say, the Church can give account of itself in terms of the social habits and forces of mankind, just as the home and the state can give similar accounts of themselves. Each arose out of human need, and was constructed of ma-

terials that were at hand. Each has undergone evolution. Each acts and interacts upon its environment. None is more supernatural in its origin than the others, nor is its form more superhumanly determined.

It seems hardly necessary to state these things. But the Church has so long been considered a sort of importation into the social order instead of a construction within the social order by forces and habits which lie back of all institutional phenomena, that it is necessary to reaffirm the social point of view again and again.

The whole system of dogmas with which the Church has been overgrown is made possible by the Church's blindness to this basic and obvious fact. Every form of sacerdotalism, sacramentarianism, magic and legalism roots itself in the uncritical fiction that the Church came into being *ab extra*. And every dogma that limits divine grace to such exclusive channels as the historic episcopate or the holy communion or the baptismal water, dissolves into pure unreality once it is seen that the Church is a social institution with a human history, and that its rites and ordinances and organization have been determined by essentially the same kind of social factors and forces that determine any institution.

Nothing is more obvious to the mind not prepossessed by traditional dogmas than the fact

that the Christian Church grew from *within* the social order of the first Christian century. It was not superimposed upon the social order. It was not miraculously let down from heaven. No supernatural foreordination entered into its making. Moved by the strong social forces which Christ's newly imparted life had released in their souls, the early Christians drew together for fellowship and for power. They needed no external divine command to thus draw together in a communal association. The establishment of an order, a freemasonry of the religious life—that is to say, a Church—was humanly inevitable. Inner, natural, social forces are perfectly adequate to account for the forming of the Church without drawing upon miraculous or mandatory sanctions of any sort. The Church found its authority for existence not in any thin legalistic decree, but in the eternal spiritual life which the indwelling Christ was imparting to the souls of his followers. Upon this fact, a divine fact and an out-and-out human fact, the Church was built. This is its impregnable foundation; other foundation can no man lay.

The particular forms of their community life were not arbitrarily determined for these early Christians. They drew together under the sanction of forms to which for the most part they were accustomed. Nor were they infalli-

bly guided by any miraculous intervention of the divine will. There is no warrant whatever for the assumption that the direction of the Holy Spirit to which on occasion they referred was miraculous. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they constructed the Church, as was most natural, from materials with which they were familiar in synagogue and temple. That their selection of materials was not always infallibly wise is disclosed in the sharp differences later arising between Jewish Christians who were accustomed to certain rites and the Gentile converts who were not accustomed to them. This clash of diverse social and religious customs was the divine way of winnowing the materials which naturally belonged to the spiritual life of the growing Church from those that did not belong to it. Had not Gentile social customs come into the reckoning, circumcision and many ceremonial regulations would have become as much a part of historic Christianity as baptism and the Lord's Supper.

And even in the Lord's Supper there is registered the mark of this same clash of custom. At the first this rite was an integral part of an actual meal, celebrated just as on the Passover night when Jesus had first suggested it. Jewish habits and temper were such as to have so perpetuated it. But Gentiles had no social traditions enabling them to make a religious

sacrament of a common meal. They could not celebrate this, therefore, without gluttony and revelry. The simple holy love-feast became a scandal. To save the sacramental element at all a distinction came to be made between the Love-feast and the Eucharist. The former retained in itself the human fellowship and the latter the divine communion, quite abstracted from the warm simplicity of the human situation in which it had first arisen. It was not long until the Eucharist was invested with magic, and even the mock food and drink transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ.

Had it not been for the working of these common human social forces within the institution of the Lord's Supper we might now be observing it not as a mere symbol of a meal, a make-believe meal, but in the primitive Christian way as a feast of actual food and drink sanctioned by the sacramental purposes of fellowship and worship.

In the case of baptism, the initiating ceremony into the Christian community, there was at the first no clash between the customs of the two sections of the Church. The mode seemed equally appropriate to both Jews and Gentiles. Immersion, as we have seen, was the commonly accepted device used in conferring Jewish citizenship upon a Gentile proselyte. It had therefore come to be the natural device for solemniz-

ing an initiation into a new religious order. It was its very customariness that made it of value to John the Baptist. Had he invented some novel symbol of his own, his moral purpose would have been eclipsed by the people's questions and his own explanations of the external act. Had he asseverated that a physical act which the people were exhorted to obey was appointed of God, he would yet more surely have drawn their minds away from the repentance which he enjoined and the new order of righteousness which he was endeavoring to establish. He would thus have been not the herald of the Messiah, but a true successor of the Pharisees.

John therefore had used an objective act about which there would be no questions asked, and for which no explanations or supernatural sanctions would be necessary, and had placed his whole emphasis upon the moral message he was commissioned to declare. As respects the symbol of initiation into his new order, therefore, John had followed the line of least resistance, which was the line of social custom.

In like manner the early Church, beginning among Jews, followed the natural line of social custom, the line of least resistance. With the new life surging in their souls they were in no mood to invent a new form of initiation, nor to argue with any man that one form was better

than another, nor to claim the authority of their Lord for one form above another. They, too, would have eclipsed their essential message had they found themselves making a physical act co-ordinate with the faith and repentance and forgiveness which they experienced and preached. They practiced immersion as the device for administering baptism because it was the thing at hand. Immersion was not Christianity's contribution to custom. It was custom's contribution to Christianity.

And when Christianity invaded the Gentile world, the Jewish custom of initiating converts by immersion in water did not clash with a diverse custom of the Gentiles, or a lack of similar custom, as in the case of circumcision, the Levitical regulations and the Lord's Supper. On the contrary, it found immersion quite as indigenous among Greeks and Romans as among Jews. No social adjustment was necessary here. No explanations were called for as to the superiority of one physical act over another. No apostle was compelled to drag in the authority of Christ to make immersion acceptable. The act was taken for granted. The authority of Christ was not used up on insubstantial matters of external form but kept for the weighty matters of righteousness, mercy and faith.

Thus we see how incidental was the adop-

tion of the physical act of immersion by the primitive Church. It took its place in the initiating ceremony of the Christian order because it had occupied a similar place in initiatory ceremonies of other religious orders to which both Jews and Gentiles were accustomed. It was a natural, not a novel, thing for the early Church to do. Its basis was in social custom, not in legal mandate.

But why did the early Church baptize at all? And why does the Church today baptize? Does baptism have any actual function that can be stated in sociological terms?

Minds that are working close to reality in our day are impatient of all institutions that do not link themselves actually with concrete human life and justify their existence by their function in human life. Such minds cannot think in the categories of magic or sacramentarianism or legalism. They regard all institutions which find no terms in which to justify their existence save these categories as not simply superfluous but harmful cumberers of the ground. Baptism, many such persons feel, is such an institution.

This impatience with baptism is due to the fact that the conventional apologetic for it is more or less magical or wholly legalistic. The unethical character of this apologetic is apparent to most earnest minds who think through to

its implications. But the functional interpretation shows baptism to have an entirely different setting. It connects the ordinance with organized religion and gives it an actual service to render.

If we are to have a Church at all, a distinct social institution taking its place in the social order beside other institutions, baptism follows. The organization of religion upon a voluntary principle, for fellowship, worship and service, makes baptism, i. e., ceremonial initiation, necessary. There can be no Church, in our Christian, democratic sense of the term, without baptism. Abolish baptism and you abolish the Church. For baptism is the Church defining itself. The ceremony marks the line between the Church and the world.

That a social institution is necessary for the nourishment of spiritual religion and as a means of rendering its moral program effective in the world is assumed in these chapters. It is both inevitable as a result of the social impulse in those who are of like mind concerning Christ, and prudential as a result of rational reflection upon the best means of bringing in the kingdom of God. All the forces that draw men together in political parties, in lodges, in labor unions, in scientific societies, in guilds, in clubs, in fraternities, in every kind of common bond, operate with more resistless power to draw them

together on the basis of common religion.

The principle of freemasonry with which our whole life is shot through finds its deepest interpretation in the Church. Here men are bound by the freemasonry of the spirit. It is not wealth, nor common craft, nor common intellectual pursuits, nor any adventitious thing whatsoever that binds them. In the Church, ideally, men truly meet on the level, the deep level of spiritual manhood—there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus. This absolute democracy of the Church is its chiefest human glory.

Democratic as it is, heterogeneous as is its composition, the Church needs some act by which it may register in its corporate mind and in the soul of each member the reality of this communal life. Each recruit must feel that he *belongs,* that he has rights and privileges in the spiritual community. He must be made to feel at home. This sense of fellowship, of actually being a part of the social entity, is created by formal initiation—baptism. The welcome of individual members does not suffice, although without it the formal initiation is hollow. There must be a corporate act, representatively performed, in which the social will of the group meets the will of the individual and confers upon him the new status. This is what every

initiatory act does—in the state, in marriage, in lodge and guild. In the Church this act is sacramental, and properly so, because the freemasonry into which it introduces one is religious.

But the initiatory rite is solemnized, not alone for the sake of adjusting the individual comfortably to the new social group, but to give the group authority over the individual. Baptism is a means of social control. The ideals of the Christian community are defined in the soul of the initiate as obligations henceforth. The time of indecision is past. Freedom to do or not to do is no more. The individual has now been put in a position where he must feel the strong stimulus of the social will into which he has merged his own. Its judgments are registered in his conscience to confirm or to condemn his acts. Without such initiation, such conferment of the Christian status upon individuals by the Church, the Church itself would lose its identity; it could not be a definite self-conscious social organization.

VIII.

THE FUNCTIONAL VIEW OF BAPTISM (Continued.)

IN SPEAKING thus of baptism the reader is asked to keep in mind the basic distinction we have made between baptism itself and the particular physical act by which it is solemnized. The baptism whose function it is to define the corporate life of the Church as an institution in the social order is not a physical act; it is a social, a spiritual act. It utilizes the physical, to be sure—as do all social acts—for purposes of expression, publicity, solemnization, or symbolism; but the essential thing in the baptismal act is not its overt physical sign, but its organic significance.

The full absurdity of the immersionist contention that baptism and immersion are equivalents does not appear until an analysis of the ceremony in social terms has been made. Even in the practice of those who hold that the immersion is the essence of baptism it is the non-physical factor that has significance. This social content of the act is what distinguishes the baptismal act from a mere bath. Many immersionists, to guard themselves against teaching water re-

generation, are accustomed to distinguish the baptismal act from a mere bath by defining baptism as "the immersion in water of a *penitent believer*." They imagine that this definition somehow puts into the physical act of immersion a spiritual content! If they insist that the immersion be preceded by faith and repentance they feel somehow that they have "spiritualized" immersion!

But of course penitent believers are, presumably, many times immersed without being baptized! To say that baptism is the immersion of a penitent believer leaves us therefore quite as hopelessly upon the physical plane as does the doctrine of water regeneration. Such a definition does not give us any principle by which to distinguish the baptism of a penitent believer from his accustomed bath. Both acts are the immersion of a penitent believer. What is it that gives baptismal significance to one act of immersion performed by a penitent believer while other acts of immersion performed by the same penitent believer have no baptismal significance? This question the dogmatic immersionist does not answer, because to answer it is to confess that the distinctive and essential thing in the baptismal ceremony is not the physical act of immersion at all but the social act of induction or initiation into the Church of Christ. It is obvious that the mere precedence of immer-

sion by faith and penitence does not give to the physical act a baptismal character. Nor is the definition helped by adding the august names of the Trinity as directed in the Great Commission. Even so, the essential element in baptism is left out—the spiritual, social act of self-commitment and self-consecration by the individual and his induction into the Church.

There is no natural connection—ethical, logical, psychological, or otherwise—between faith and immersion or between repentance and immersion. Faith has other and natural ways of expressing itself; repentance has other and natural ways of expressing itself. Never in a millennium would an ethical faith or an ethical repentance feel drawn toward the physical act of immersion in water as a particularly appropriate mode of self-expression, or to any other physical act. The natural expression of moral faith and moral penitence is a *moral* act. Service, self-denial, resistance to temptation, forbearance, tolerance, humility, love of truth, the pursuit of righteousness, communion with God, love—these are the true and natural outward signs of the inward graces of faith and repentance.

The physical act of immersion is nothing in itself; it was taken up by force of social custom and made the symbol, the expression, the publication to the world, of the social act of

initiation into the body of Christ. It marks and memorializes, on the human side, the meeting place of the corporate will of the Church and the surrendered will of the penitent believer in a spiritual act of mutual identification.

By a procedure which the present writer regards as irregular and unfortunate, involving a distinct loss to the Church, this primitive custom of solemnizing initiation into the body of Christ by immersion in water has been changed to other forms throughout a large part of Christendom. There are good and sufficient reasons, as we shall undertake to show, why the early practice should be restored. But the usual reason put forward by immersionists, namely, that immersion, and immersion only, is baptism, is intolerable. Baptism is validly solemnized by other forms than immersion. Not all who have been initiated into the Church have been immersed. The body of Christ is not composed exclusively of immersed believers. Churches that practice affusion are churches of Christ as truly as are churches that practice only immersion. And their members are truly members of the Church of Christ, validly initiated into its fellowship, that is, baptized. To urge immersion as the equivalent of baptism is to "paganize the Church," as Thomas Campbell replied to his son, Alexander, when the latter first suggested that no one had been baptized

who had not been immersed.

To the list of outward signs of faith and repentance given three paragraphs above baptism might itself now be added. By baptism is not meant immersion, nor affusion, nor any physical act whatsoever, but the moral act of uniting oneself with those who are of like mind with oneself concerning Jesus Christ. Such an act is a true moral sign of faith and repentance.

Baptism, therefore, is a moral virtue. It is not a physical act; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh. It is not an outward form. It is the response of a good conscience toward God. Its moral quality is rooted in the conscience. It has back of it the same divine authority that sanctions any other moral duty.

The duty of baptism is the duty to accept Church membership, to ally oneself with Christ's people, openly and actively, to merge one's personality into the organism of Christ's Body, contributing one's self and one's goods to the furtherance of the ideals of the Christian community, sharing any pain the body must suffer, rejoicing in the joy of its victories, finding one's life by losing it in the organic life of that community of which Christ is Head and Lord.

The next ten chapters consist of an examination and interpretation of the leading New Testament texts and situations bearing upon the question of baptism. The purpose is to find whether the functional view of baptism as initiation or induction into a religious community or order "checks up," so to speak, with Scripture usage.

IX.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

THE USUAL interpretation given to the ministry and work of John the Baptist has misled and confused the thought of many Bible students, especially immersionists, as to the meaning of baptism. From the fact that the prophet derived his title of "the Baptist" from the ceremony it is imagined by the uncritical and uninformed that he instituted the ceremony, and that in his use of it it possessed some unique authority or virtue. So far as the casual reader of the New Testament narrative observes, John's baptism seems to be not a ceremony of initiation into anything, but a detached and independent ordinance or sacrament with its meaning in itself.

A restudy of the account of John's enterprise will show us how completely mistaken such a view is. It will show us that in John's mind and in the minds of the people who heard him his baptism meant nothing more nor less than initiation or induction into a religious community, that its meaning does not inhere in the physical act of immersion in water but is derived from the movement with which their

baptism identified them.

John appeared upon the scene definitely as the founder of a new order. It was an order of penitent men, an order of righteousness. Into this order he bade men come. The proclamation of the fundamental principle and the specific duties of the new order was the burden of his preaching. He called men out, definitely, from the world and demanded that they stand with him in effecting works of righteousness. His message was directed to all, no less to the leaders of religion than to outcasts and Gentiles. He did not call men into any existing institution. He did not speak on behalf of the Jewish Church or any religious order. He attacked the devotees of prevailing orthodoxy, and swept their cherished institutions away with a reformer's abandon. The times called for a new order, an order of repentance and right-doing. John came to establish such an order and his preaching called all men into it.

This character of John's work as definitely tending to constitute a community or brotherhood of penitent men is rarely considered. His use of the Old Testament passage to describe himself as a "voice" has been over-emphasized for rhetorical purposes by many interpreters. The individualistic aspect of his message and plan receives virtually the total attention of Biblical students. The reason of this is proba-

bly the fact that John's movement as a social force never got past the stage of inchoate beginnings. It was hardly launched until it was eclipsed by the more significant enterprise of which Jesus of Nazareth was the leader. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that had not the Messiah appeared so soon the ideals and forces entering into the make-up of John's movement would have resulted in an organic religious community, that is, a Church.

As it was, we know that John attached certain disciples to himself who possessed a *quasi* authority, distinguishing them from the multitude of his converts in precisely the same way that Jesus' twelve disciples were afterward distinguished from the larger company. And after the lapse of many years the book of Acts introduces us to certain men who claim discipleship to John and membership in his movement, not knowing as yet that his movement had been superseded by that of Jesus Christ. These facts would seem to indicate that John's work was of such a nature as to bind men together in a more or less defined social group.

But the chief fact that calls for a social interpretation of John's movement, as against the view that he concerned himself wholly with individuals, is his practice of the rite of baptism. We have already seen in our study of the origin and early practice of baptism that this

was the ceremony by which proselytes were initiated into Judaism. As such a ceremony it was perfectly familiar to the people to whom John came. The fact that he is never prompted to offer an authoritative sanction for the ceremony proves that it was a well known and accepted custom. And the fact that he makes no explanation of any peculiar meaning which he attaches to it proves that he uses it with the accustomed meaning.

If it had been a new ordinance which John derived from heaven he would surely have given the people a divine sanction for it. There would have been questions and expressions of doubt from the people, and the prophet would have devoted much of his teaching to the establishing of his novel sacrament. But instead, both people and prophet seem to have been relatively unconscious of the ceremony as such. No great reformatory significance would have attached to his ministry had he preached repentance and immersion in water. Repentance was not novel. Immersion in water was not novel. There would have been no pertinency in Jesus asking the Pharisees on a later day the question concerning the baptism of John, "Was it from heaven or of men?" If repentance and immersion had been the burden of John's preaching they would have answered without hesitation, from heaven. But the significance

of John's baptism had lain in the fact that he had commanded *them* to be baptized! He did not command them to be *immersed*—that could easily enough have been brought into their elaborate program of ceremonial washings. And as for the repentance which he enjoined, they could have gotten around that without embarrassment. But John commanded them to be *baptized*. He preached to them, the leaders of the Jewish Church, the chosen people of God, that they must be initiated into a freemasonry of penitent men seeking righteousness, as a preparation for the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. His call to baptism was a call to join his new moral community.

This was the heresy of John, and his distinction as a reformer: he excommunicated the Church! He declared that the very leaders of religion were hugging a delusion. They said, "We have Abraham for our father; the promises are to him and to his seed; we are the direct heirs of the promises." But John said, "You are trusting in a fiction; God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham; no hereditary order will suffice; when Messiah comes he will see through your ecclesiastical pretensions; his flail is in his hand; he will thoroughly cleanse his floor; the wheat he will store in his barn and the chaff shall be burned with fire."

It is in John's attitude toward the representatives of religion that his significance and the significance of his baptism stand out. He told them that they did not belong to the true Church of God, and he commanded them humbly to bring forth appropriate fruits of repentance and *join* the true Church of God! This was what his baptism meant. It was a baptism of repentance, an initiation into an order of penitent men. It was in his mind the beginning of a new order of Judaism, a spiritual order, whose fulfillment should come to pass at Messiah's appearing.

We can well understand the moral authority with which John spoke such a message as this. But it is impossible to understand how he could command a specific physical act like immersion with moral authority. Why should any man be under obligation to heed such a command? Who is this wild stranger that presumes to tell us that we must be immersed at his hands? This is the way intelligent men would have met such an arbitrary mandate. But John is neither emphasizing an old ceremonial washing nor introducing a new rite—he is no partner of the Pharisees. He is the prophet of a new religious order, an order of righteousness, the vision of which he has caught in the wilderness. He calls men to the Jordan's banks that he may tell them of it and at once initiate as many as accept

his message. It is his vision of a spiritual order that is the source of his moral imperativeness. It is his proclamation of a spiritual order that puts every hearer under moral obligation to accept his baptism.

John's use of the baptismal ceremony was both striking and revealing. It left no doubt in anybody's mind as to what the prophet's message meant. Baptism, as we have seen, was the rite of initiation of a proselyte into Judaism. John's use of it, his insistence that all should submit to it, involved the invalidation of their present status before God. To ask the children of Abraham to be baptized meant that their blood-kinship to Abraham counted nought. It put them on precisely the same level as the proselytes whom they compassed sea and land to secure. It said to them, "You are no better off before God than the proselytes! Let every man repent and be baptized into a new order of righteousness; for the kingdom of God is here."

And because John laid the axe at the root of the tree of Judaism, and cut down every delusive pretension, and made a beginning at establishing a true religious order on the basis of righteous manhood, as over against privilege and heredity, Jesus himself bore this testimony of him that he was more than a prophet, and that of all men born of woman none had arisen greater than he.

X.

JOHN THE BAPTIST
(Continued.)

IT IS CLEAR that the meaning of John's baptism could not have inhered in the specific physical act of immersion by which it was solemnized. Nor was the baptism a merely individualistic expression of repentance. It was the act of the penitent individual allying himself with a social order of other penitent men in an endeavor to practice the ideals of right-doing which their prophet-leader enjoined. It was through baptism, with the organized community which it implied, that John proposed to conserve the results of his ministry. By means of it the repentance and moral decision which his preaching produced were objectified, socialized, carried out of the private closet of subjective experience into the open world of social control.

John was not content with being a mere voice, quickening men to repentance and moral aspiration. He well enough knew how easily these subjective states are dissipated unless they are embodied in a social fellowship of like-minded men. Hence he commanded baptism. He was not simply a preacher; he was the or-

ganizer of a movement. He quickened men to repentance, but he also commanded them to come out publicly and join the pre-messianic order of penitent men which he was inaugurating.

This *coming out publicly and joining* was baptism. Baptism was the single word which covered the whole initiatory act—its social aspect of induction and its individual aspect of self-commitment; its essential psychical or spiritual content and the incidental physical form by which the act was solemnized. John, the people perceived, was the founder of a pre-messianic movement and he made it his business to initiate men into it, that is, to baptize them. Therefore they called him the Baptist.

The fact that initiation into his movement was signalized by immersion was purely incidental, customary. If he had adopted some other form of initiation he would have been compelled to step aside from his main purpose of urging repentance as the prime prerequisite of fellowship in the new brotherhood in order to explain why he had chosen his novel form. The form of immersion was already in use. It meant to the people in its customary use in initiating proselytes precisely what John intended it to mean in his use of it—it was the outward mark and seal of the conferment of a new religious status. But the baptism was not the immersion; it was the conferment of the status, the

initiation into the new order.

It was in this large social and religious connotation that Jesus used the word when he asked the Pharisees whether the baptism of John was from heaven or of men. We cannot imagine Jesus concerning himself with a question so typically pharisaic as to ask whether the physical act of immersion was from heaven or of men! Nor can we imagine him diverting the minds of his hearers from great moral issues to accuse them of not having been immersed in water at the hands of John. Besides, John had not claimed divine authority for immersion, any more than for the garment of camel's hair that he wore. He had claimed divine authority for his mission, his movement, and therefore for his baptism, but the particular physical act of immersion by which he signalized baptism seems not to have become a matter of consciousness either to himself or to the people. Jesus' question to the Pharisees was a moral question. It cut through their whole system of religious pretension and made them face again the facts of conscience with which John had confronted them over three years before.

By the baptism of John, Jesus plainly meant John's enterprise, his ministry, his movement, the new order of repentant souls which he had sought to establish as a spiritual preparation for Messiah's coming. The enterprise of John,

was it from heaven or of men? Was John's work divinely planned or was it a mere human project? Was his order of penitent men an inspiration of God or was it the vagary of a fanatic? This is the question Jesus put to the Pharisees under the single category of "baptism." It discloses the breadth and content of the word.

And the Pharisees understood it precisely as Jesus meant it. In preparing their answer they did not reason concerning John's authority for practicing immersion; they reasoned concerning the authority for his ministry, his enterprise. And one side of their predicament was, as they clearly saw, that if they said John's authority was from heaven, Jesus would ask, Why, then, had they not believed in him? They did not seem to fear that he would ask why they had not been immersed!

It is perfectly clear that the point at which the Pharisees reacted against the mission of John was where his enterprise cut across the pretensions of their aristocratic religious order. If John had stood *within* that order, if he had acknowledged the authority of its traditions, the validity of its claims to the divine promise, his message of repentance and righteousness would have been not wholly unacceptable to the leaders of the Church. He then would have spoken in comparative or relative terms. He would

have said, "Yes, Messiah is to come of the seed of Abraham. You who are the children of Abraham are peculiarly the custodians of the divine promise. But even to you he will not come without repentance and right doing. Come, let us turn from our evil ways and let us serve God in righteousness!"

In these comparative terms John might have spoken. But he did not. He spoke in absolute terms. He stood *outside* their order and condemned it as a deceptive fiction. The son of a priest, he had reacted against the whole system of formalism and had spent many ascetic years in the wilderness.

As he appears on Jordan's bank the whole dramatic setting makes it plain that he approaches the Jewish Church as an outsider. At no time does he seek to establish points of identification with the Church. He makes no allusion to his having sprung from priestly loins. He is an out-and-out iconoclast. He does not undertake to repair the old Judaism. He is no tinkering compromiser. He believes that the old order has grown up upon fiction. He lays the axe at the root of the tree, and predicts that Messiah when he comes will even more drastically than himself complete the work of reformation.

The Judaism of John's day was a messianic religious order, hereditary in its determining

principle. But John said that the true messianic order must be moral, spiritual, not hereditary. It must be an order of penitent men seeking righteousness, not an order of blue-blooded aristocracy. God's children are not determined by heredity, he said. The true children of Abraham are not those in whose veins his blood runs but those in whose souls his faith dwells. God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham!

And so, to set his movement in the attitude of directly challenging the existing order, he appropriated the baptism belonging to that existing order. This baptism was the gateway through which converts to the Jewish messianic order entered it. What John took was not simply the physical act of immersion, but the social and religious meaning of which the physical act was a sign and token. His baptism meant precisely the same for his order of penitent men that the rite meant for the Jewish messianic community.

It is no marvel, then, that the Church leaders refused to accept John. At the first it seems they were disposed to accept him. Matthew tells us that John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming "to receive his baptism." They misapprehended its meaning. They may have thought that it was merely a ceremonial washing which John was administering. That

sort of a bath was to them a religious delight. They were perfectly willing to be immersed. They were not unwilling to repent. But John quickly undeceived them. He was not interested in immersing them in water. He was not interested, either, in their repentance, regarded simply as a subjective, individualistic state of mind. He was interested in their uniting with his brotherhood of penitent men.

Do not come to me thinking within yourselves that Abraham is your father, he said. This baptism of mine is not a ceremony of purification for those who already *belong to* the messianic order; it is an initiation into the *true* messianic order. It is not just a sacrament of your church; it is the initiating ceremony into the true Church. To receive my baptism is not an act which comes under the sanctions of your traditions; it is an act destructive of your traditions. My order of penitent men is not a movement *within* your hereditary Judaism but a movement *opposed* to it. To receive my baptism is therefore to acknowledge the invalidity of your present status before God and humbly to accept membership in the order of penitent men as the true preparation for Messiah's appearing.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees opened their eyes to this meaning of John's baptism they saw that he had carried off bodily the

gate of their messianic order and hung it at the entrance of his messianic order, leaving them as a result altogether outside the gate! His baptism disfranchised every man of them! It excommunicated the church! Through that gate they too must go. They must be inducted into the true messianic order. They the converters of proselytes must themselves be converted. They the children of Abraham must take their places on a level of spiritual freemasonry with publicans, social outcasts and Gentile soldiers. They must yield their proud fiction of hereditary status and accept the moral status of penitence and right-doing. No wonder they refused his baptism and hated him!

XI.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

THE ACCEPTANCE of baptism by Jesus at the hands of John interprets the meaning of the rite even more clearly than does its rejection by the Pharisees. He accepted it for precisely the same reason that they rejected it. Both he and they understood it as an act of initiation into a new order, a social movement. Neither he nor they regarded it as an individualistic act assumed to possess some intrinsic sacramental virtue. Its meaning was not in itself but in the movement with which it allied each man who submitted to it. Had the baptism of John been a detached institution, standing in its own right and finding its meaning either in itself as an ordinance or in the penitent individual who was baptized, the attitude of both Jesus and the Pharisees would have been exactly contrary to that which they respectively did assume. That is to say, the Pharisees would have been willing to receive it and Jesus could not have received it. The Pharisees rejected John's baptism because they rejected John's movement of which it was the initiating rite. Jesus accepted John's baptism

because he wished to enter and be a participant in John's order of penitent men. It was neither the reception of a sacrament nor submission to the physical act of immersion at which the Pharisees recoiled; they were unwilling to be identified with John's movement, his order. It was neither a mere sacrament nor a specific physical act which Jesus accepted in accepting baptism at John's hands; he simply wished to identify himself with John's religious movement and he allowed John to induct him into it.

The most curious pieces of Biblical interpretation extant are afforded us in the conventional attempts to account for the baptism of Jesus. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. But why should one be baptized who had no sin of which to repent? What could baptism have meant to the unstained conscience of Jesus of Nazareth? Various answers are given. One of these gives the baptism a messianic significance: Jesus chose to be baptized in order to formally announce his messiahship, to inaugurate his redemptive ministry. This, however, is purely fanciful. There is not a suggestion of Scripture to justify it. That the baptism was providentially used as the occasion of his self-disclosure is evident, but that it was so intended by Jesus when he came to John there is no hint. It is an unnecessary straining of

the event to make it mean something unique in the purpose of this one candidate. It attributes to the mind of Jesus an official and formal cast which his subsequent ministry and experience do not bear out. Whatever is to be said about his later consciousness, it is clearly much easier to interpret his messianic thought at this stage in ethical, spiritual and filial terms than in legal and official terms.

Another explanation of the baptism of Jesus is that he submitted to immersion in order to set his future disciples an example. This interpretation is naive and artificial. It assumes a sort of dramatic consciousness in Jesus that he was acting a part before men, rather than living a real, human life. No act of Jesus was purely exemplary. To him, of all men, every act had a moral motive rooted in his own experience. He would be the last to ask his followers to imitate any specific act of his; what he wished of his followers was that they should imitate him in always relating their actions to moral motives that connected vitally with their own experience. The core of his ethical message was the emancipation of men's souls from every kind of slavish imitation whatsoever. It dishonors Jesus to interpret his baptism as a mere dramatic pose.

Still another interpretation is the legalistic. This view professes to be based upon Jesus' re-

ply to John's remonstrance: "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." In this view the physical act of immersion is conceived as a divine command, and submission to it as therefore an act of righteousness on Jesus' part. This text is used as the pillar and support of the crassest legalism. Here plainly the spiritual experience usually associated with baptism, namely, repentance, is not present. The legalist feels that he is dealing therefore with the sheer abstract physical act of immersion and he finds Jesus submitting to this physical act "in order to fulfill all righteousness." Immersion, therefore, he argues, is a moral act! And this submission of Jesus to it binds immersion upon all his followers as a moral duty.

How the divine authority for this particular physical act was communicated the legalist does not say. The Jews did not regard this form as of divine origin; they derived it not from their Scriptures but from custom or rabbinical regulation. Certainly, John never calls attention to immersion as of especial divine sanction. He claims no authority for it whatsoever. He simply practices it. This legalistic view that the saying of Christ refers to immersion as a fulfillment of all righteousness is based, therefore, upon a sheer assumption. The legalist must first find a "thus saith the Lord" for immersion before he can expect his dogma based upon

this text to be received by the Christian world.

The fallacy in all these views lies in the fact that baptism is considered apart from its concrete social situation, as if it were an abstract and independent institution with its meaning in itself. When we look at John's ceremony in its actual social connection we see it as an auxiliary institution, rendering service as the doorway into a religious order of penitent men which the prophet was organizing. For men whose consciences were quickened into repentance by John's preaching, the baptism was simply the act of joining his movement. It involved no more mystery in the case of Jesus, who was without sin, than in the case of a Pharisee or a publican. To him the baptism meant precisely the same as to them. There is no need whatever of making the baptism of Jesus unique. Instead of being unique, it was an act in which our Saviour sought to identify himself with his fellows, to do what they were doing, to pass through the same initiation into the freemasonry of men who were seeking to do the righteous will of God. The meaning of his baptism is not found in the baptism, but in the spiritual freemasonry into which the Baptist was urgently calling all men. The fact that Jesus' baptism was not a baptism of repentance affects not one whit the meaning of his baptism, though it does lend to his membership in the messianic

community a unique graciousness. He was baptized because he wished to become a member of John's community of disciples; he wished to put himself in the position of a follower of John, because he believed John's movement was the enterprise of God. His baptism, therefore, had no reference to his own individual experience of sin or sinlessness, nor to any divine authority sanctioning the physical act of immersion; it was, on his part, a moral act of self-identification with John's movement, the contribution of his personality to a social community whose ideal was evidently inspired of God; and as such it was truly an act of righteousness and grace.

If we go back to Nazareth and approach the baptism of our Saviour from his point of view, the interpretation we have set forth in the foregoing paragraphs will take on verisimilitude. It is by no means a matter of mere conjecture to trace out the mental pathway which the thoughts of Jesus traversed in the period immediately preceding and including his baptism.

None save the most reverent pen may essay to tell how the divine Spirit first awakened the messianic idea in the soul of Mary's son; by what suggestions the possibility that he might be Messiah came to be entertained by him; how this possibility passed into vague wonder and from wonder into a clear, earnest question:

Am I he?; how one day he dared to answer this question with a timid yes, an affirmation which he tolerated only to fling it immediately away before its blasphemy should burn his heart; how his sensitive, agitated soul must have many times doubted its own sanity on account of this persistent, inescapable question; how the affirmation returned again and again—in his mother's presence, at the reading of some great prophet's message, at his bench or on the lilied hillside where he liked to go for solitude and prayer. To trace out the psychical process through which our Saviour passed as he gradually awoke to the fact of his divine mission may not be possible as a task of detailed description, but as a task of spiritual appreciation it is possible.

There are three points at which the Scripture story discloses to us the secrets of Jesus' inner life at this period. Given these points, it is not difficult to determine the curve and direction of his mind. One of these is the fragmentary reference to his life at Nazareth, which tells us that he grew in wisdom as well as in stature, and in favor with God and man. Another is the account of his temptation in the wilderness, which discovers to us the struggle of his soul to define just what sort of a Messiah he should be. Lying between these two is the baptism, with its disclosure of the divine confirmation to

his soul of his messianic character.

Taking the narrative as it stands, it seems evident that the baptism was the occasion when this fact was inescapably revealed. Here at the Jordan, when he had been baptized, the Voice spoke to him and perhaps to John, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It is hardly probable that this disclosure was a sudden surprise to the soul of Jesus; it was more like a decisive confirmation of years of reflection and wonder and communion with God.

If we take the plain statement of Scripture concerning Jesus' growth in wisdom at its face value, we will raise no question concerning his growth in messianic wisdom as well as other wisdom. There was a time when Jesus did not know himself as the Messiah. Later there comes a moment when he does know beyond peradventure that he is the Messiah, the Son of God. That this fact, fully declared at his baptism, had been gradually emerging in his consciousness through the years there can be no doubt. Here in the growing consciousness of our Lord is a field for legitimate exploration by the disciple who possesses the mind of the Master, whose imagination is sensitive and quickened by reflection upon the more clearly revealed facts of Jesus' life and especially by his most significant utterances.

Of this we are sure, that the long, long strug-

gle between the audacity of the divine promptings and the natural humility and shyness of his soul brought him at last to a calm commitment of himself to God, to do His will, to await His leading and to hope for some unmistakable token of the Father's pleasure in him. It was as if in one of those night-long prayers to which he was accustomed, he had said to his Father: "Thou seemest to call me to be the redeemer of my people. I cannot escape thy Spirit. I will no longer contend against thy promptings. I will do thy will, O God. I will try to be thy Son. I give myself to thee. If thou canst fulfill the expectations of thy people in me, if prophet's foretelling, if thine own foreordaining, may find their answer in me, I will try. Yea, if thy fatherly longing for one Son who shall serve thee truly to the end of the day without sin may be satisfied in me, I will try to be that Son!"

It was with this tentative settlement that he came to his thirtieth year. He had no program. He felt that up to the present there was nothing in his life that he must undo. He carried no past sin into his future. He waited calmly, patiently, for the unfolding of the will of God.

And then the voice of John sounded through the wilderness of the Jordan and echoed in the towns of Galilee. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord," he said. "The kingdom of Heaven is

at hand." It requires but little imaginative effort on our part to realize how this voice must have struck thrill and awe through the soul of Jesus. Eagerly he would listen to the reports of John's preaching brought by travelers from the south who passed through Nazareth. This prophet must indeed be sent of God, he would say. Constrained by John's great fame as a preacher of righteousness and the organizer of a pre-messianic movement, Jesus went to Bethabara himself.

The great notes of John's message rang through the soul of this auditor with a meaning more clear than they possessed even for the soul of the Baptist. He heard the note of Judgment in the prophet's message. He heard the note of Preparation for the coming Messiah and the imminent kingdom. He heard the note of Universalism—that neither caste, nor nationality nor Abrahamic descent availed with God, but a penitent heart and a purpose to do righteousness. He heard the note of Reformation—that the old messianic order was fictitious and deceptive; that a new order of penitent men must supersede it; and he saw John inducting men into the new order.

XII.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS
(Continued.)

ALL THESE great structural notes of John's message aroused in Jesus inexpressible emotion. This is God's doing, he said. John is God's prophet. His message is God's truth. His movement is God's enterprise. What his own attitude should be Jesus was not for a moment in doubt. Consecrated as he was to do the will of God, to take one step at a time until the full purpose of God should be disclosed to him, he perceived that duty called him to ally himself with John's movement.

Up to this time his consecration to God was an individualistic, private, inner purpose. He had not allied himself with any voluntary social movement of righteousness, because, first of all, there was none (though there were many movements that claimed a messianic character) to which he could give his allegiance, and besides, his own soul had been engaged in the inner struggle of defining its relation to the divine will. A provisional solution has now been given to this struggle, a sort of working

hypothesis, upon the basis of which he is ready to take his place actively in any movement that is evidently inspired of God.

He goes forward, therefore, to identify himself with John's movement, to socialize his inner consecration, to stand with penitent men who seek to do God's will, to humbly take the place of a disciple of the fearless prophet who is already laying the axe at the root of the tree of effete Judaism. John's work, he sees, is God's work, and the prompting of God's spirit urges him to invest his personality in it. Whether John and Jesus had been personally acquainted before this time we do not know, though it is not unlikely that here at the Jordan from day to day there was afforded an opportunity for conversation on the high themes of which the Baptist discoursed.

At all events, when Jesus presented himself for baptism the prophet was well aware of the superior insight of Jesus into the things of God. He remonstrated with him. I have need to be initiated by you into the secrets of the divine will, he said. I have no grace to confer upon you. You have grace which should be conferred upon me. My movement is elementary. I speak but the rudiments of the will of God. I cannot allow you to be put in the position of a disciple of mine. I should be your disciple. "I have need to be baptized of thee."

But Jesus said: "Suffer it to be so now." He, too, knew his superiority to John. He was aware of the incompleteness of John's message. It was a message of repentance and righteousness—an ethical message. As such it would soon reach its limitations. It was a prophetic message. But Jesus was aware that the message of human redemption must have in it the priestly note of sacrifice, of atonement. John's preaching was austere, peremptory. It lacked those characteristics of graciousness and patience with human sinning which Jesus felt belonged to a full revelation of God. He was aware, thus, of the temporary character of his relation to John as a follower. Suffer it to be so *now*, he said. Let us leave the question of superior and subordinate to God. It is clear that your work is in the plan of God. Yours is an enterprise of righteousness. I wish to stand with you and your penitent disciples. In allowing me so to do we shall be fulfilling the righteous will of God.

And John baptized him, made him a member of his messianic community, conferred upon him the status of a disciple, a status which Jesus willingly and humbly accepted as a tribute to the divinely sent prophet and an act of self-identification with his fellows who were seeking the kingdom of righteousness and awaiting the coming of the messianic king.

How the rich significance of this crucial event in both John's and Jesus' lives is legalized away by those who would make the Baptist say, I have need to be *immersed* of you! In what conceivable sense could John have needed to be *immersed* of Jesus? If baptism was the physical act of immersion it would seem more appropriate that the subordinate should immerse the superior, than the superior the subordinate. But because the baptism was the conferment of a status, the initiation into a social community or fellowship of which John was the teacher and leader, he felt the inappropriateness of conferring the badge of the community upon one whom he regarded as superior to the community and to himself.

It was not the physical act of immersion but the social, spiritual presuppositions of immersion that gave ground in John's mind to his remonstrance. And these presuppositions constituted the essential nature of the baptismal act to which our Saviour submitted.

If we search for something distinctive and unique in the baptism of Jesus we shall find it not in the baptismal act as such, but in the fact that he, the sinless one, was willing to take his place by the side of sinful men and merge his unstained personality into the common life of sinful men seeking righteousness. This was an act of benignant grace. It was the beginning of

that redemptive ministry which consisted in actually making his own the sins of the world, in identifying himself with sinful men in the freemasonry of the Incarnation. His baptism was in very truth a vicarious baptism of repentance for remission of sins. Those commentators who are struck dumb when they see Jesus, the sinless one, coming to a baptism which in the case of every other candidate has reference to the remission of sins, are obsessed with the idea that the baptism is a mere personal sacrament, with its meaning in itself and producing an effect directly upon the soul of the one baptized. They identify it with the washings of purification, common among the Jews. But this is to miss the essential thing in the baptism. It was initiation. Its virtue was not in itself. It bestowed no forgiveness of sins. Its essential character was the public avowal by the candidate of the ideals and obligations of John's community of penitent men and the social act of induction into that community.

It allied the candidate with a communal life in which would be found forgiveness and righteousness.

It was into this communal life that Jesus wished to enter. He felt the sense of solidarity with all men. He was here on a mission of incarnation. He stood on man's level. Know-

ing no sin, he became sin, that he might redeem mankind. It is as idle, says a great teacher, to tell a wife that she has no need to feel ashamed because her husband is committed for fraud, as to tell Jesus that he need not be baptized because he has no personal guilt. It is precisely in this, his self-identification with men in an initiation into an order of the penitent, that his divine character is disclosed. This is the very spirit of Messiah.

The baptism of Jesus was thus his first messianic act—not because the baptism was unique but because he was unique. What more appropriate time could the Father have chosen to put beyond further doubt the messianic character that he bore? We do not marvel that to his soul the divine disclosure came as he went up from the water, "Thou are my beloved son; I am well pleased in thee!" The provisional solution of his long struggle has passed into a certainty, the working hypothesis into an indisputable fact. He now *knows*. From this time forward he never doubts his inner dignity as the one on whom Israel's redemption rests.

And some days afterward John, seeing him mingling with gracious freemasonry in the throng of the sinful, stopped his discourse, and, pointing his staff at him, said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world! He must increase, but I must decrease!"

XIII.

BAPTISM AND THE COMMISSION

THE CRUX of the baptism controversy is the interpretation of the Commission recorded in Matthew's gospel as the farewell words of our Saviour. On the assumption that baptism and the physical act of immersion are equivalents, legalism appeals to Matt. 28:19 as its Magna Charta: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

It is claimed that this text puts the authority of Jesus behind immersion by an unequivocal mandate. It is important, therefore, to submit this claim to the most rigid examination. As Christians we are committed to do whatever Jesus Christ bids us do. His will is the normative law for our conscience. Our faith is in him. We believe that he knows the will of God and the laws of our human life better than we, and that he is a safe guide even when our reason does not agree with his command. Hav-

ing given him our allegiance, it is our instant and abiding duty to understand his mind, to know his will concerning us. If he has commanded immersion in water we are in all good conscience and loyalty bound to be immersed.

It would be a short-cut and by no means insufficient treatment of the question—in the light of our previous studies of the meaning of the word "baptize,"—to rest content with simply pointing out that there is no reference to *immersion* in the Commission, but to *baptism*. These two, as we have seen, are not equivalent and interchangeable terms. Baptism is essentially a spiritual, social act of induction into a religious community, the conferment of a new status upon a convert. Immersion is a physical act which, mainly by the incident of custom, was used in the time of Christ as the sign and token of this volitional act of community and candidate. So far as the sheer argument requires us to go, it would be enough merely to call attention to this verbal point and close the case. But this would not be completing our task. Our task is not simply to find the meaning of the word "baptize" but the meaning of baptism itself. We may use the meaning of the word, we must use it, in determining the meaning of the act, but the meaning of the act takes us behind words and lexicons into the minds of those who participated in the act of baptism.

Our problem in studying the Commission is to discover, if we can, the larger program of Jesus as it lay in his own mind at the time the Commission was uttered, and in that program to find the meaning of the baptism included in it.

Before entering upon that fascinating quest, however, we are compelled, in candor, to reckon with the objection which an imposing body of scholarship is today making, namely, that the baptism clause (including the trinitarian formula), if not the entire text of Matthew's Commission, is not a part of the original writing but an interpolation by a later hand. The consideration of this aspect of the subject takes us into a technical field somewhat unfamiliar to the general reader. But it is our purpose to treat the materials in an untechnical way, only summarizing the facts involved, omitting details and lengthy citations from authorities. It is well known to the reader, no doubt, that the authenticity of the last twelve verses of Mark's gospel, including his account of a Commission similar to Matthew's, is rejected by scholarship generally, both conservative and radical. The other gospels contain no record whatever of such a Commission. We are dealing, therefore, with Matthew's record alone.

It is not the presence of baptism in the Commission that first suggested to scholars the possible later origin of Matt. 28:19, but the pres-

ence of the trinitarian formula—"into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This formula, says Harnack, "is foreign to the mouth of Jesus and has not the authority in the apostolic age which it must have had if it descended from Jesus himself." "The trinitarian formula," says Marcus Dods, "in the mouth of Jesus is certainly unexpected."

In the numerous references to baptism found in the book of Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament we would expect that so precisely formulated a rubric for baptism would be used. Instead of this the New Testament is silent on the trinitarian formula, and the book of Acts uses another formula four times—Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5—twice "in the name of Jesus Christ," and twice "into the name of the Lord Jesus." Paul's allusions to baptism "into Christ" or "into Christ Jesus" would seem to bear out the view that the earlier formula of baptism used only the name of Jesus, and indicate that the trinitarian formula was a later addition.

It is also argued that the definite statements by Luke (Acts 1:5), contrasting John's water baptism with the baptism of the Holy Spirit which the disciples were soon to receive, make against the likelihood of Jesus' commanding them to baptize with water. Moreover, Paul in writing to the Corinthians declares that Christ

sent him "not to baptize but to preach the gospel." It is hardly conceivable that Paul, who was exceeding careful concerning his apostolic reputation, would acknowledge such a limitation in his Commission, if Christ had specifically commanded the other apostles to baptize.

But the problem concerns not simply the clause of the Commission enjoining baptism and prescribing the formula for its observance, but the entire Commission itself, taken as a whole. There is in the entire utterance as it stands in our first gospel a certain dramatic, speech-making quality which we do not find Jesus assuming in the earlier and authentic records of his sayings. We do, however, after a century and more has elapsed, find, in the later tradition, apocryphal sayings issuing from the lips of Jesus in this august and heroic tone of voice. Had Jesus assumed such an attitude of legal authority over his disciples as this Commission implies, it would indicate a lapse from that high level upon which he had placed them just before his death, when he said, Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends; you are not so much to do my commandments as to participate in my spirit and my plans; the servant knows not what his master is doing, but I have tried to make known to you all the things of my Father. Whatever counsel Jesus may have given them about their impartation to the

world of the new life they had received from him and which had been revived and established by his resurrection, it is contrary to his whole attitude that he should set up at the last a statutory regulation dealing with precise methods of procedure, back to which, as to a norm, the disciples were evermore to refer. He, not any statute that he promulgated, was to be the norm of their lives.

But apart from this *a priori* consideration, it seems incredible that words of such august moment as this Commission is assumed to be should be entirely omitted by Luke and John. It is inconceivable that anyone writing the story of Jesus would omit so important an utterance at the very climax of our Saviour's mission. It may be argued that Luke at least does record Jesus as teaching that repentance and remission of sins are to be preached to all nations, and that baptism was virtually inseparably associated with remission of sins in the minds of the early Christians, so that, *by implication,* this gospel also records the baptismal injunction. But this is irrelevant. The question is whether baptism is connected with remission of sins because the two are associated in a formal Commission of Jesus, or for some other cause.

If they are associated together because Jesus authoritatively joined them, Luke's omission to

state it so is incomprehensible. Either Luke knew of the Commission to baptize and omitted it or he did not know of its existence. The former is very improbable.

Beyond the failure of other gospel writers to record the Commission is the failure of the early Church to use it in those typical situations where such a formal, precise and comprehensive regulation would naturally have applied. Nothing is more evident in the New Testament than the freedom with which the early Church met and discussed each problem on its own merits, never once appealing to a legislative statute or a body of statutes left it by the Lord. And, as has been shown by a recent writer,* there were many situations in which the mere quotation of such a Commission would have settled differences that were most serious. Yet the main actors in the early Church, men who were present at the time the Commission was supposed to be given, did not once refer to it.

If a Commission of this sort had such a place of authority in the minds of the apostles it is remarkable that Peter did not refer to it at Pentecost. Afterward when the rulers demanded "by what authority" the apostles spoke, they referred to the resurrection as a fact they

*Jasper S. Hughes in The Christian Century, November 2, 1911.

were constrained to preach, but made no reference to any legal Commission. Moreover, Peter's need of a special vision (Acts 10) to convince him that the Gentile Cornelius was a proper person to be initiated into the Christian community is inexplicable if he already had the august and precise command of his Lord to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them." At the Jerusalem council called to consider this very matter of receiving Gentiles it is incomprehensible that, instead of debating the question at such great length and with bitter division of sentiment, some one did not simply quote the authoritative mandate of the Lord. Paul's assertion of entire independence in his apostolic call and commission is significant, also. When justifying his ministry he made no reference to an authoritative Commission common to all the apostles, but insisted that his personal call was complete, the other apostles having "added nothing" thereto.

The cumulative effect of the evidence produced by these various lines of inquiry impels the scholar to examine carefully the ancient documents with reference to the authenticity of the Commission as it stands in Matthew. As to manuscripts, three things are to be said: (1) All extant manuscripts, even the most ancient, represent late recensions of the original text; (2) the best manuscripts are defective at the

point of the Commission; but in all manuscripts and versions that we have access to the text is found as we have it in our Matthew. However, the New Testament quotations made by the Church fathers indicate the existence of a text in which the Commission appears in a form unlike the original. Eusebius, writing about 300 A. D., quotes Matt. 28:19 twenty-one times. The words, "baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," do not occur in these quotations, but the text reads: " . . . make disciples of all nations in my name, teaching them to observe," etc. In a few of these quotations the phrase "in my name" does not occur. He also quotes it in the form with which we are familiar four times, but these are all in his later writings whose Eusebian authorship is disputed on grounds entirely irrelevant to our present inquiry. This seems to prove that Eusebius, in his earlier writings at least, used a text of the gospels which did not give the words traditionally attributed to Christ.

Justin Martyr and Hermas, writing earlier than Eusebius, give indications of their possession of a text with the same omission. Justin, in writing of baptism, justifies the practice and the use of the trinitarian formula by an appeal to apostolic tradition and the prophet Isaiah. He could hardly have failed to use the authori-

tative words of Jesus' Commission had they been in his possession.

The conclusion of a large body of reverent and careful scholarship in the face of these facts is that our Matthew 28:18-20 does not give us the *ipsissima verba* of Christ, but represents the influence of tradition working upon the earlier text.

XIV.

DID CHRIST COMMAND BAPTISM?

IT IS NOT the purpose of the present study to take sides in the textual controversy over the words of the Commission. No feature of our argument is at stake, whichever side the reader may feel compelled to take. If we concede, for the sake of the argument, that criticism has effectually invalidated the whole of Matt. 28:18-20, this will not in the least affect the essential facts to which this text refers. Nothing could be more premature than the triumphant announcement that, because Matthew's text of the Commission is proved unauthentic, therefore baptism was no part of the will of Christ and of his program for the future.

Apart from all legal authorization, it would have been impossible for the disciples to carry out the manifest will of their Lord and the burning passion of their souls without baptism. There is nothing strange at all in the presence on the lips of Christ of an injunction to administer baptism. It would have been strange had he taken counsel with his disciples concerning the carrying of his gospel into the

world and omitted to say anything at all about inducting their converts into a communal life.

The reasons certain readers stumble at the authorization of baptism by our Lord are two. In the first place, it is pointed out that Jesus himself did not baptize during his ministry. In the opening weeks of his public life his disciples did baptize, thus continuing and extending the as yet unfinished work of John; but it is probable that the practice was soon discontinued. No allusion is made to the rite again. If baptism had been a part of the ministry of Jesus it would in all likelihood have been referred to in his Commission to the seventy (Luke 10:3-16). Manifestly, baptism was not a significant part of his pre-resurrection ministry. Hence to many it seems difficult to explain the prominent place given to the rite in Christ's final program.

The second reason for this difficulty is that baptism is conceived as a mere sacrament, a detached institution with its meaning in itself, and assumed to produce by its intrinsic virtue a beneficent effect upon the soul of him who submits to it; or as the mere physical act of immersion in water performed in obedience to an assumed divine command. Those who stumble at baptism in Christ's final program cannot believe that he would have fixed upon his followers an ordinance with either of these

meanings. His whole ministry was directed against sacramentarianism. And the imputation to him of an arbitrary command to perform a sheer physical act in his name is morally repugnant. We have seen in these chapters, however, that both of these conceptions of baptism are false, that baptism is neither a detached sacrament nor a physical act, but an auxiliary rite in a religious order, performing the function of initiation into the order. When we hear the word on the lips of Christ, therefore, we must consider whether in this its true meaning it is incongruous with the spirit of his ministry. That it is not incongruous, but perfectly natural, even inevitable, it is our purpose to show.

Christ's mission is described by himself in the words, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." At the outset of his public ministry he resisted three great temptations that would have deflected him from this divine program of giving life to mankind. With marvelous consistency he kept the spiritual, inward, vital character of his ministry constantly before him. Popularity with the multitude did not deceive him. The people followed him, he discerned, from motives of curiosity or of greed, "because of the loaves and fishes," and not because they grasped his message or cared

for it. He might have promoted an organizing propaganda among the people with enormous success. He could have established a religious order, a cult, or a church. John's success proves this, and at the first, while Jesus was yet in the position of a disciple of John and preaching John's message, he made more disciples than the Baptist himself.

But Jesus refused every suggestion to draw men together in an organized community under his leadership. He escaped from the multitude when they would have made him king. He saw clearly that he could promote or allow organization only at the expense of the revelation he had come to make, at the expense of the redemption he had come to mediate. The life, he perceived, must precede organization. It was his task therefore to impart life, to sacrifice numerical and organizational success to the sure planting of the divine life in the souls of some men. He may have cherished at the first the hope of imparting this life to the multitude. But when they betrayed their crass motives he deliberately tested their fealty with a "hard saying." And as the people forsook him he turned to the twelve with disillusionment and pathos in his look and asked if they also intended to go away. His searching question brought an answer from their leader which bound them to

him with renewed devotion, "To whom shall we go? Thou only hast the words of eternal life."

He did not wish to draw masses of men into an organization, into a religious community, by principles of social contagion or accretion. The key to his life's success was in getting individuals, as such, to see, to understand his message, and to possess the power of his own divine life. The crowd followed him by the constraints of social psychology. But Jesus wanted the inward, independent, moral loyalty of individual men. Here, at least, in these twelve men, were signs of discernment, of spiritual vitality. He determined, therefore, to devote himself to this small group of men, to get them to understand him, to impart to them his life. He must create a lump of leaven, ever so small, to fold into the dough of human society. It will leaven the world, he sees. But if he starts an organization before he has effectually imparted the life men will be engrossed in the mechanism of the kingdom and miss the power thereof. If, on the other hand, he makes sure of imparting the life, the organization will take care of itself. The life will provide itself a body by natural law and divine grace.

Here, then, we have a point of view from which, if we look out over Christ's ministry,

we shall see plainly why his teaching activity contains no use of baptism or allusion to it, and why at the last he makes it an integral and prominent part of the program his disciples are to carry out in the world. The absence of baptism from his three years' ministry is explained by the absence of organization. Where there was no organizing activity or purpose there could not be any baptism. For these three years Jesus had been sowing seed in individual hearts. He asked for no public committal. He kept his little company perfectly informal. They were his friends, his disciples, that was all. The only evidence of organization that we can find is Judas' treasurership. Christ was working upon these individual souls. He had no expectation now of converting the multitude. He never drew the net, but went on teaching his disciples from day to day, living his own life intimately before them, using the multitude with their diseases and distresses and sins as a sort of clinic from which these few might learn the secret of his own divine inner life.

This marks a striking point of difference between Jesus and John. The latter led a movement. He was called "the Baptist" because he commanded that all men should be baptized, that is, initiated into his order of penitent men. But his order was premature. He did not im-

part to men the permanent *power* of penitence. He did not give men the abundant life. He demanded a harvest without sowing the seed. He was impatient, peremptory. Therefore his order was temporary; therefore, he must decrease while Jesus increases. John's was the short-sighted vision. Jesus' was the long look ahead. He saw the importance of imparting the Life before organizing the Church.

And this made him the Saviour.

But when the roots of divine life and grace were fairly planted in the soil of these human souls that had companied with Jesus throughout his public ministry, then he was ready for the Church. They must go out and carry to the world the life that he has imparted to them. But they must have organization. They are many; he is one. He, being alone, could work with them by a relationship purely individualistic. They, being many, can work with others only by following the laws of social order. They, too, must impart the life—"make disciples of all nations." But in addition they must draw men together in a freemasonry of love on the basis of the new life they possess in common—"baptizing them." It is not enough to impart the life. They who receive the life must be unified in a social community for purposes of power and fellowship. Only thus can the life be conserved. Left to

isolated individuals the life would eventually be lost, dissipated, or corrupted. Therefore when a disciple is made let him be inducted into the community of believers, let the social status of a Christian be conferred upon him.

In this way would the Christian community define itself in the social order, becoming a haven of comfort and inspiration and instruction for its members, and a definite and calculable force to hurl against unrighteousness in the world. All this is involved in the command of Jesus to baptize. If, holding Matthew's Commission in abeyance, it be said that we have no evidence that Jesus commanded baptism, then it must be said that the sheer, spontaneous, uncommanded impulse of the disciples to impart the life to others which they had received from the Master would inevitably involve the practice of baptism. Social law is sufficient to account for baptism without Christ's authoritative mandate. But given the social necessity of baptism in the fulfillment of the spiritual purposes of the disciples, it seems not unreasonable to assume that Christ had anticipated their experience by defining for them their program.

In this view of the vision and purpose of our Lord in his parting conversations with his disciples, it becomes almost profane to suggest that he commanded them to *immerse* their

converts *in water!* Such a command could have no conceivable relevancy to anything that had gone before or was to follow. It is totally foreign to the speech and spirit of our Saviour and unworthy of him. He had no intention of fixing a physical act upon his followers. He did not have in mind the *form* of baptism but the *meaning* of it. To put immersion into his mouth here, before his ascension, is to break down his exalted ethical and spiritual consistency, and to break it at the climax of his life. All the evidence, both as to the meaning of the word "baptize" in its Scripture usage and the interpretation of this occasion on which our Lord is assumed to have used it, makes the immersionistic construction of the Master's command impossible.

XV.

THE ONE BAPTISM

PAUL'S formulation of the seven-fold bond of Christian unity constitutes one of the most remarkable texts in the New Testament. It is found in his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 3-6.

"Bear lovingly with one another, and try hard to maintain in the bond of peace the unity which the Spirit gives. There is but one Body and one Spirit, just as there was but one Hope set before you when you received your call. There is but one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism. There is but one God and Father of all—the God who rules all, works through all and lives in all."

It is sad to think how such an utterance as this, aimed directly at the encouragement of unity, has been made the occasion of division among Christ's people. The "one baptism" has been torn from its context because it had a sound as if supporting the immersion dogma, and has been given an application wholly foreign to anything in the apostle's mind. Meanwhile its profound and vital significance for the Church in all time, and in our time especially, has gone undiscerned.

No consistent attempt has, to our knowledge, been made by those who have misused this section of Paul's great utterance to interpret it intelligibly. It has been used by advocates of the immersion dogma not so much as a part of their argument as a rhetorical climax to the argument. After proving by the well-known methods that immersion was the primitive practice in contrast to the optional practice of modern denominations—giving to the candidate the choice of sprinkling, pouring or immersion—the disputant clinched his point by this quotation from Paul: "There is one baptism," leading his hearers and himself to believe that it explicitly condemned everything except immersion. Had he critically examined his use of Paul's words, instead of merely grasping at the advantage offered by their rhetorical sound, he would have discovered that, instead of supporting his contention, this text cannot be made to fit intelligibly into his dogma at all.

The immersion dogma, as we have seen, is based upon the assumption that the word "baptism" as used in the New Testament is always equivalent to "immersion." This assumption, of course, seals immersion with all the authority and importance which the Scriptures assign to baptism. In some passages the substitution of "immersion" for "baptism" in the text does

no violence to the sense. In other passages, as in the Commission of Jesus and Peter's exhortation on the day of Pentecost, the substitution makes sense but is morally intolerable. In this passage the substitution is neither morally tolerable nor intelligible. If for a moment the reader will throw off the literalistic bonds which hold us all, more or less, and allow his untrammeled moral sense to freely judge of the affinity of the physical act of immersion with the august spiritual realities of this text, he will feel, we are sure, the incongruity of its presence in this catalogue.

It is inconceivable that the religion of Jesus, so thoroughly spiritual, should have lifted an arbitrary physical act into a co-ordinate position with the Faith, the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father Himself. Few, if any, of the pagan religions will disclose a defect so crass as this. It is inconceivable that Paul, whose great plea was the freedom of man from ordinances of all sorts, and who made the great argument for the spiritual character even of Jewish circumcision, declaring that "outward bodily circumcision was not real circumcision," that "the real circumcision is that of the heart, a spiritual thing and not a literal one"—it is inconceivable that Paul should here have elevated an outward physical act up to the level of the great structural factors of Christianity. It is mor-

ally improbable that the "one baptism" here can mean one immersion.

And, in addition, it would be safe to challenge any advocate of the immersion dogma to make the passage *intelligible* by the substitution of "immersion" for "baptism." Why should Paul wish to say there is but one immersion? What meaning could such an utterance have? No one regards it as a thrust at trine immersion, for all save trine-immersionists regard that procedure as of a considerably later origin. Certainly there is not the slightest suggestion of condemnation of any other form of administering baptism, e. g., sprinkling or pouring, for, in the first place, there was at this time no hint of departing from the accustomed practice, and, in the second place, the text could not be made to mean that if there were. To say there is "one immersion" does not forbid saying also, "there is one sprinkling." The word "immersion" cannot be made in this context to fit any thought process of the apostle. It is only as it is used in connection with the modern practice of these forms that the sound of the words "one baptism" seems vaguely to confirm the immersionist contention.

Not only the debaters with a dogma to defend, but the critical scholars and commentators have been baffled, many of them con-

fessedly, by Paul's association of baptism in the august company of the Body, the Spirit, the Faith, and the Father. The tendency to minimize baptism is strong with them. In an ethical religion like Christianity, it is difficult to exalt a "mere ceremony," as they conceive baptism to be, into a co-ordinate position with those structural verities with which Paul here classes it.

All conceive baptism as a detached institution, standing by itself, with its meaning in itself, analogous, say, to the Lord's Supper. And the question is asked, "Why did Paul omit the Lord's Supper from his catalogue of the unities? The only answer seems to be that the rhythm of the language in which Paul had cast his thought—two groups of three unities each and a third group of one unity with a three-fold ascription—had so fascinated him that he rejected the Lord's Supper rather than spoil the rhythm! And the implication seems to be that Paul included baptism not because it really had a meaning for his thought in this context, but because it filled out the rhythm!

But of course this is but to play with the words of Paul. Commentators must not think that, like themselves, the apostle has any interest in filling space with words. His words are spoken with conscience and each one counts for reality. We can hardly imagine

him, at the lofty altitude his thought has reached in this Ephesian letter, either rejecting or selecting his ideas according as they made or marred the rhythm of his utterance. Why, then, was the Lord's Supper not included? To ask this is to have our attention directed to the key that unlocks the entire passage and illuminates the presence of baptism in this august company. The difference between the Lord's Supper and these seven is that it is an *expression* of Christian unity, while these all are *constitutive* of Christian unity. That baptism should be grouped with those great factors which underlie and determine the unity of Christ's people shows it to belong not to the class of merely sacramental rites but indicates its function to be structural as well. That is to say, baptism is a necessary factor in constituting the Christian order, as well as a helpful means of grace. And for Paul to say that there is but one baptism is to define the sort of unity that should obtain in the Body of Christ.

Our study hitherto has so far familiarized us with the social character of baptism as initiation into a religious order that we are ready at least to try this meaning on this text. Baptism, as we have said, has a richer connotation than initiation; the words are not quite equivalent, but the latter is the skeleton of

the former. Allowing for this difference, we find that the whole text is made intelligible by reading, "There is but one initiation."

There is one body, Paul would say, and it is a democratic body. There is but one initiation into it; when this initiation has been undergone the initiated stands on a level with every other member of the body, in an absolute freemasonry of the Spirit. There are no "advanced degrees" in the Church of Christ. There is no exclusive circle into which one may aspire to be initiated; no outer and inner court; no status for Gentiles and another for Jews; no status for masters and another for slaves, no status for men and another for women. These distinctions of race and society and sex all vanish in the one baptism by which we all become one in Christ Jesus. The initiated slave is as fully in the Body of Christ as is the initiated master. The inducted Gentile is as fully in the body as is the inducted Jew. The baptized woman is as truly an organic part of the body as is the baptized man. There are no further baptisms, no further mysteries to be initiated into, no higher degrees to be conferred. Once baptized the initiate is on a level with every other Christian.

Ideally, the Church is thus in Paul's mind the realization of absolute democracy. There is

no caste principle in it. The distinctions which separate man from man in the world outside are left behind at baptism. There are no further baptisms because there is nothing further to be baptized into. All the riches and mysteries of grace are open to him who has passed through this single gateway of the Kingdom of God. Progress after baptism is not measured by changes of social status, progressive initiations, the conferment of superior degrees, but by the enrichment of personal character.

How perfectly the social conception of baptism fits into this context! The "one baptism" is an actual ground and reason for maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. It is as truly constitutive of unity as is the one faith or the one hope or the one Lord. The Lord's Supper is not constitutive; it is expressive of the unity already existing, but it does not determine the unity. It might, conceivably, be dispensed with, without destroying the unity. But baptism could not be dispensed with without disintegrating the body; and with the disintegrating of the body faith and hope are dissipated; and with faith and hope dissipated the work of grace by Father, Son and Spirit is undone. If there is to be, then, a Body of Christ, a Church, an organized communion of believers set into the social order of the world

and maintaining itself over against the world order,—if there is to be such a body, a definite, public, solemn ceremony of initiation in which the will of the individual shall meet and be embraced by the will of the body is a social necessity. This ceremony is called baptism.

But social necessity does not set a limit to the *number* of baptisms. Such a body might organize itself so as to provide successive social levels, with appropriate baptisms at the entrance to each order. Manifestly the unity of such a body would be unlike the unity we know as Christian. There would be aristocracy, patronage, pride, exclusiveness, all within the body. But Paul says we are all one in Christ Jesus. There are no levels, but one level. Our unity is grounded in the absolute freemasonry into which the one and only baptism admits us. Such a democratic unity is "the unity that the Spirit gives."

Paul's conception is worked out in greater detail in Corinthians, chapter xii. There are differences within the body, he says. But these differences are functional, not stational. It is a serious matter when those with conspicuous gifts assume that they have been exalted to a station higher than those whose gifts are more humble. All the parts of the body are essential to the well-being of the body. The eye cannot say to the foot, "I have no need

of you." "It was in one spirit that we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free men." Here, so far as status goes, we are on the same level, and divergence of function must never deceive any of us into the notion that we are higher or lower than our brothers. In the Church of Christ there is no higher or lower. There is but one baptism.

In the face of the thirteenth verse of this Corinthian chapter and the high ethical idealism of the whole context it is amazing that the immersion dogma could so much as get itself formulated. Nothing but the most wooden legalism could tolerate the substitution of the physical act of immersion for Paul's reference to baptism here. The passage is absolutely opaque if this substitution is made. Clearly, what the apostle has in mind is the social nature of Christian baptism. He sees it not as a physical act nor as a detached institution, "a secret vow between the soul and Christ," but as a social act of self-identification with the Christian community. The Spirit is the element in which this act takes place—"in one spirit are we all baptized," and the Church is the end toward which the act is directed—"baptized into one body."

The essential nature of baptism is plainly not a physical act nor an independent sacra-

ment with its meaning in itself, as is the case of the Lord's Supper. The meaning of baptism is found in the Church, to which it points and for which it exists. It is an institution of transition; its meaning is beyond itself. The candidate is always baptized *into* something —"into Moses," into Judaism, into repentance (i. e., the kingdom or community of penitent men), into the Church, into the body, into Christ himself.

"Unto what, then, were ye baptized?" inquires Paul of the Ephesian disciples of John, who had some vague knowledge of Christ but had never been identified with the Christian community. They had received John's baptism only. On hearing the word of the apostle they were baptized "into the Faith of the Lord Jesus." Their baptism at John's hands had been precisely the same, *as baptism,* as that which Paul administered. In both cases the physical act of immersion was the same. And yet the former was not regarded as Christian baptism. The sole difference between them was social. The earlier had been an induction into John or John's community; the latter was an induction into Christ or the community of Christ's followers.

XVI.

BAPTISM AND CONVERSION

THOSE PASSAGES of Scripture which plainly connect baptism and the remission of sins, or baptism and salvation, have long been the battle ground of Christian opinion.

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."—Acts 2:38.

"Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sin, calling on the name of the Lord."—Acts 22:16.

"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh but the search of a good conscience after God."—I Peter 3:21.

With this group are usually quoted those texts which speak of being "baptized into Christ," which we have already considered, and the unauthentic record of the commission attached to Mark's gospel: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned."—Mark 16:16.

These texts of Scripture have stood like spectres in the path of those who would interpret Christianity as an out-and-out ethical and spiritual religion. The whole body of New Testament teaching, both of Jesus himself and the apostles, presents plainly enough a consistent spiritual unity save for these few texts which seem to sanction a sacramentarian element. The effect of this apparent antimony in the sacred record has been to cause those committed to the spiritual interpretation practically to ignore such passages as these in the interest of what they conceived to be the dominating element in Christianity; while those committed to a strict construction of the letter of the Scripture have naturally seized upon passages like these as lending themselves to a definite "scheme" of salvation more intelligible to their type of mind than a salvation stated in terms of spiritual life or moral character.

It will be conceded by all that if we are to regard the New Testament as in any true sense the interpreter, the carrier, of the Christian faith these passages of Scripture connecting baptism with salvation, and obviously as a condition of salvation, must be fairly faced. They must be declared and proved to be interpolations or else given the respect due them as true representations of original Christianity. No effort to discredit their textual rights hav-

ing been made, we are bound to admit that in the minds of early Christian writers and in the thought of the primitive Christian Church, baptism was associated with salvation as a vital factor in the conversion experience, and seems to have stood upon a level with faith and repentance. It does us no good to wince under this admission. It will be said that such an admission discredits Christianity as an ethical religion. If this be so there is no other course open to those who must have an ethical religion save to find some other religion than Christianity. For in actual, historical Christianity baptism seems to have been regarded as prerequisite to salvation.

The attempts made to twist the Greek prepositions translated "into" and "for" and "unto" so as to place baptism *after* the remission of sins are curious enough. But they avail nothing. Leaving on one side now the ridiculousness of hanging the soul's salvation upon the turn of a preposition, let it be assumed that the post-salvation construction is valid. What has been gained? Nothing at all. Baptism still stands in the minds of those holding this view as an "act of obedience" to the divine will. Nobody pretends to get rid of baptism itself by locating it after the forgiveness of sins. But if it is sacramentarian before forgiveness it is equally so after forgiveness. No conceivable objec-

tion can be made to baptism as a means to salvation that cannot be made to it as a means of grace. It is no less repugnant to our moral sense to think of baptism as an act of obedience to Christ after salvation than an act of obedience to him before salvation. It is the dread of the doctrine of baptismal regeneratian that lies behind the forced effort to construe New Testament language so as to make baptism an act of the Christian life rather than an act by which one becomes a Christian. But baptism as a condition of *attaining* the Christian life is surely no worse than baptism as a condition of *maintaining* the Christian life. It seems better therefore in this case, as in all cases, to cling to the natural, obvious meaning of New Testament utterances and allow the doctrines to take care of themselves.

This dread of the doctrine of baptismal agency in salvation is due to wholly false conceptions both of baptism and salvation. In the long and often bitter controversy over the matter, baptism is conceived of either as the physical act of immersion in water or as a detached individualistic ordinance with its meaning in itself. The objectionable views have therefore been denominated "water salvation" and "sacramentarianism." But, as we have seen, baptism in the New Testament agrees with neither of these constructions. It is not a physical act. Neither

is it a mere sacrament. Its meaning is not in itself but in the body of believers with which it identifies one. Unlike the Lord's Supper, which is essentially a sacrament, baptism is essentially an organizational act and *incidentally* a sacrament. It is the social act of incorporating the individual into the Church of Christ. Baptism thus not only *expresses* something, it *effects* something. It is not simply the "outward sign of an inward grace"—it is that, but it is more. It is the actual transformation of this inward grace into a *social* reality. The soul's moral situation is really changed by baptism. The believer has become an actual part of the social organism of believers, his faith has been published, his repentance has been clinched, his feelings and purposes have been drawn out of his subjective experience and knitted in with the feelings and purposes of others who are of like mind with himself concerning Jesus Christ.

With respect to salvation one is tempted to say much. It must suffice, however, for our present purpose, simply to characterize the popular view and, in contrast, to affirm the New Testament view. The popular view is legalistic. It conceives of salvation as a legal act of God, performed on behalf of the soul upon the fulfillment of certain more or less arbitrarily fixed conditions. The divine act of forgiveness takes place in the remote will of God and is regis-

tered in the soul (if at all) by a certain kind of experience which, analyzed, is usually emotional in nature. God's act is an act of grace; it takes no account of the character of the one pardoned. Indeed it is essentially an act of *imputing* a righteous character to one not righteous, but who, in conforming to the terms of God's "plan" of salvation, has somehow made it possible for God to wipe out the past and give to the soul a new start under such changed relations with God as will allow the development of character. With this view of salvation it is plain why many spiritually minded teachers of religion cannot tolerate baptism as a prerequisite of salvation. It is hardly thinkable that, in the divine ethics, the act of forgiveness should be inhibited, pending the performance of a mere sacramental act by the supplicant. And, of course, on these legalistic premises, it is manifest that a God who devises a "plan" of salvation, including as one of the "terms of pardon" the performance of a formal act, is an inferior God, ethically, to one who grants his pardon on purely spiritual "terms."

But all such objection to the position given baptism in the New Testament vanishes when we take seriously to heart the New Testament conception of salvation. Making allowance now for the survival of a certain modicum of legalistic elements in early Christian thinking, it can

hardly be denied that salvation in the New Testament is identical with character. It is not a substitute for character. It is an out-and-out ethical, spiritual thing. This is hardly less true of Paul himself, out of whose rich imagery the legalistic doctrine has been woven, than of Jesus. With the Master, salvation is no abstraction existent in the divine mind and imputed to the soul. It is a concrete moral reality, expressed always in the gross terms of every-day righteousness. To be saved is to be pure in heart, to be meek, to be lover and helper of fellow-man, to be truly aware of God. With Paul salvation is to be "worked out" "in fear and trembling." Salvation is character, and character is Christ in us. God's forgiveness is not withheld pending man's fulfillment of certain conditions. The forgiving act is God's characteristic and eternal attitude. The lamb was slain before the foundation of the world. Christ is the revelation not of God's "plan" but of God's forgiving nature. It is the knowledge that God has forgiven that underlies repentance and faith, and prompts them, leaving no room for any man to boast. Forgiveness, then, as a divine act, is not a reward of obedience to a "plan" which God has devised. Forgiveness is itself the plan. God saves men by disclosing his eternal forgiving grace despite their sins. And it is this disclosure that leads them to repent.

In terms of human experience, therefore, forgiveness is the actual reception of God's life, his grace, his character, his righteousness. It is not an abstraction. It is not a legal imputation. It is not a divine fiat. It is a concrete moral reality. The remission of sins is the actual forsaking of them. Forgiveness is not realized, on the human side, in the feelings but in moral character. The salvation that belongs to Christianity is through-and-through ethical. God forgives man, not by changing his own mind toward him, but by actually making the man over. Of one thing those who have known Jesus Christ may be sure, namely, that the Father is eternally of the same mind toward his children. There are no "laws" which he has "decreed" through the keeping of which man may be saved. His laws are his own righteous ways of life. To be saved is to walk with God in those righteous ways. And God's eternal passion has been to make known his own life to man, that thus he might save man, a passion which was at last accomplished in Jesus Christ. Christ is the righteousness of God, and to be saved is to have him indwelling in the soul.

Thus baptism and salvation are both ethical categories. The question to ask concerning baptism is not: Has God decreed it as one of the "terms" upon which he will grant pardon to the sinner? The implications of such a ques-

tion are such that one cannot answer yes to its truth nor no to its error. But let it be stated rather as a question of fact and not as a question of divine decree, thus: Does baptism actually help in the recovery and perfecting of spiritual character, in the actual remission of sin and the building up of Christian manhood? Such a question may be, must be, answered yes. And why? Clearly because Christian character is both a social product and a social force. It is not created in isolation, and it cannot exist in isolation. It demands the social freemasonry of others of like mind concerning Christ in order to its own completeness, and it seeks such freemasonry as a medium through which to render its utmost service to the Kingdom of God. Baptism, as we have seen, is the social act of incorporation into this freemasonry. By whatever outward sign or signs the act of self-identification with the Christian community is solemnized, it can hardly be disputed that the social act itself does effect something, does alter the situation. As truly as faith effects something or repentance effects something, baptism effects something. It is a positive ethical factor in salvation. It is not a ceremonial fiction. It has moral potency and importance. It saves faith and repentance from sentimentalism. There is no need to mumble our words when we read, "Baptism doth also now save

us," nor to invent ingenious devices for eliminating baptism from Ananias' exhortation to Saul or Peter's injunction on the day of Pentecost or the Master's Commission to his disciples. Baptism belongs in the conversion experience. It is a prerequisite to the kind of salvation that Christianity seeks to give. It is difficult to conceive how in any New Testament sense one may be called a Christian who has not accepted it.

In the chapters on "The Functional View" we discussed the function of the ordinance from the point of view of the Church as a social institution with a social task. In the present chapter we are discussing the same thing but from the point of view of the individual. This chapter might properly be entitled The Psychology of Baptism. All the considerations which make for the necessity of an organized Church in the social order make obligatory upon the Christian-minded individual that he shall identify himself with the Church—all these and additional considerations centering in his own personal need. No conversion is complete until faith and repentance have become socialized by baptism. Not only the possibilities of personal growth in the Christian virtues are limited by refusal to ally oneself openly with Christ's people, but the reality of the remission of past sins is rendered extremely dubious by such

refusal. Those who have made shipwreck of their Christian profession simply because they failed to attach themselves definitely and vitally to the organic life of Christ's people are a great multitude. The typical evangelism which obtains in our day is censurable for its lack of the baptismal note. Our evangelism preaches faith and repentance but is afraid of baptism. It awakens religious aspirations but fails to carry these impulses into social objectivity. The implications of its gospel are that conversion is an experience between the soul and God, and as a result many a soul imagines it is converted and saved when it has simply experienced a shower bath of its own emotions. At this moment world-renowned revivalists are reporting their meetings as resulting in three, five and ten thousand conversions, when less than three, five and ten hundred—or even so many scores —have been added to the Church. That a community should be manipulated into a high state of religious feeling and the Church of Christ thereafter register no perceptible increase in its working force for the Kingdom of God is an unapostolic procedure. There is need—profound and crying need—of an evangelism which, when men cry out to know what to do, is not afraid to proclaim Peter's pentecostal words: "Repent and be baptized, ... for the remission of your sins." For men *are*

saved by baptism as truly as by faith and repentance.

If our conceptions of the Church and of baptism were wholly freed from the legalistic implications which we have inherited from Rome the Roman doctrine that outside the Church there is no salvation might be translated into ethical and vital categories of tremendous power. If the Church is regarded as a legal, static institution, into which souls may flee as into an ark of safety for salvation from the wrath of God, it will be repugnant to the mind of modern men to talk of salvation in terms of Church membership. But if the Church is conceived as the body of men and women of like mind about Jesus Christ, who need one another, and who wish to spread their Master's cause through the whole earth with such facility and efficiency as can be found only in co-operation, the conception of initiation into that body as a means of personal salvation will become not only rational but tremendously appealing to the modern mind. Such an appeal calls today for a champion. It has none. Between liberal individualism on one hand and ecclesiastical legalism on the other the plain ethical duty of baptism is going unpreached. The tendency away from the ecclesiastical Church has resulted in a religion frankly individualistic, subjective, and consequently for the most part sentimental.

Individualistic religion does not organize itself. It provides no social body in which the stirrings of the spiritual life may find adequate and effective expression. The natural connection between faith and good works is talked about, but the individual is left to himself to make the connection. Individualism has no Church. It even boasts that its sanctuary is the stillness of "God's first temple."

Meanwhile the Kingdom of God waits upon the organization of Christian-minded men and women into the Body of Christ. The great ends of social righteousness are to be gained only through a vast freemasonry of righteous men who are dominated by the ideals of Jesus. There is already enough goodness in the world to save it. Its ineffectiveness is due to its social irresponsibility. Here is the field for a new and mighty evangelism. The preaching of the moral obligation of membership in the Church of Christ—specifically, of baptism—would awaken in the convert the sense of solidarity, of cooperation, of militancy, now so woefully lacking in our Church life. The new life of faith would be translated from its subjective state into an objective, practical social task in the doing of which its chances of survival and wholesome growth would be increased manifold.

XVII.

"BORN OF WATER"

IN EXAMINING the various Scripture passages bearing on the meaning of baptism, no question has been raised as to the criticism of the text, save in the case of the Great Commission whose authentic character as it now stands is subject to serious challenge. Even in that case, however, we preferred to accept the baptismal element (omitting the trinitarian formula) as belonging not unnaturally in such an utterance of our Lord, and proceeded to interpret it from the point of view of the meaning which our present study has found the word "baptize" to possess.

In one instance only, of all the texts related in any way to the baptism controversy, is it necessary to employ the results of critical study. This is the case of the words attributed to Jesus in John 3:5—"Except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." This passage has been interpreted by immersionists, and, in general, by affusionist commentators also, as referring to baptism, and would seem manifestly to indicate that immersion in water held a central place in the

mind of Christ as a condition of salvation, or entrance into his Kingdom.

In dealing with this text there are but two alternative positions possible: Either these are the very words of Jesus, or they are not his words. If they are the very words of Jesus it cannot longer be said that Jesus' religion is a spiritual religion. To make an arbitrary physical act an absolute condition of admittance to the Kingdom of God, and to place it on a parity with the inward transformation of the soul, is the grossest legalism and materialism. As the text stands it embodies the doctrine of water regeneration literally and baldly. The shuffling attempts of affusionist commentators to evade the immersionist construction of this passage are pathetic and intolerable. As the passage stands, it must be admitted by all fair-minded students that it means precisely what it says. Attempts to make the word "water" symbolic of something else, or to find ground for a retranslation of the Greek word, are equally unavailing. The passage means to say that emersion from water (with the implied immersion) is an essential and necessary condition of entrance into the Kingdom of God.

The quickest and truest way to understand a text like this is to grip it tight, not to fear and avoid it. If it is true it will surely disclose its truth. If it is false it will surely be-

tray by some token its falsity. In the case of this text neither affusionists nor immersionists have, as a class, been willing to treat squarely and seriously with it. The affusionists have shied away from the "born of water" portion altogether, choosing to lay stress for their purposes upon the "born of the spirit" portion. The immersionists, on the other hand, have leaned heavily upon the "born of water" clause but have avoided the "cannot enter the Kingdom" clause. This last clause makes the immersionist go even farther than he is willing to go. "Cannot" is absolute. It does not leave room even for the accommodating "uncovenanted mercies" of God upon which the legalist relies to save his position from involving God in arbitrary and unethical treatment of men. And the word "Kingdom" also makes the immersionist go farther than he wishes to go. Had the text used the word "Church," it would have suited him better. Immersion in water as a pre-condition of admittance to the visible organized Church is a doctrine tolerated by many immersionists, and the limitation of the Church of Christ to those alone who have been immersed is a not uncommon position for a certain type of immersionists to hold. But even these make a distinction between the Kingdom and the Church, regarding the former as a more inclusive invisible and ideal fel-

lowship while the latter is the more exclusive social institution. To say that immersion in water is an absolute prerequisite to entrance into the spiritual Kingdom of God is to state a doctrine that must be repugnant to the moral feelings of even the most hardened legalist.

The very radical and absolute materialism of the text, taken in connection with the totally opposite character of its context and the totally opposite character of all the teachings of Jesus found elsewhere in the gospels, awaken one's suspicion as to the legitimacy of the "born of water" portion in this passage. Does it really belong here? Are these the words of Jesus, or are they an interpolation of a later date? Happily, certain facts are available to confirm and justify the suspicion that Jesus did not tell Nicodemus that he must be born of water as a condition of entering the good Kingdom of which the two were conversing. Some of these facts were presented in a scholarly paper, as yet unpublished, by Professor Frederick O. Norton, Ph. D., of Drake University, which he read before the Congress of Disciples in Kansas City, Missouri, in the spring of 1912. His critical treatment of this passage has directed attention to certain quotations from patristic writings which resolve the difficulties created by the presence on the lips of Jesus of an utterance so apparently foreign to him. The

tendency toward the heresy of baptismal regeneration, to which allusion has been made in a previous chapter, accounts for the occasional interpolation of references to the necessity of baptism in portions of the Scripture text. Let us examine some of the quotations of John 3:3-5 found in the patristic writings. Justin Martyr (about 130 or 140 A. D.) in his First Apology Chapter 61, says:

> As many as are persuaded and believe that what we say and teach is true * * * are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For in the name of God the Father and Lord of the Universe, and of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit they then receive the washing with water. For Christ said, *"Except ye be born again, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven,"* Now that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers' wombs, is manifest to all. And *how those who have sinned* and repent shall escape their sins is declared by Isaiah the prophet. He thus speaks: Wash you, make you clean, etc. And the word with reference to this [rite] we have learned *from the apostles.*
>
> In order that we may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again the name of God the Father and Lord of the Universe—and in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and in the name of the Holy Ghost who foretold all things about Jesus. He who is illuminated is washed.

Justin's text of the Gospel evidently did not have in it the "born of water" clause. He appeals for the necessity of regeneration to the words of Jesus, but for the manner of accomplishing it (in water by baptism) he quotes

Isaiah 1:16-20. He would hardly have resorted to such round-about and dubious support for baptismal regeneration as the prophet Isaiah afforded had he had before him the express word of Jesus. Certainly the text of John 3:5 as it stands in our Bibles would have been just what he needed to establish the connection of water baptism with regeneration. (In a previous chapter, in discussing the text of the Great Commission, reference was made to the fact that Justin appeals to tradition, i. e., to "the apostles," for the use of the trinitarian formula, rather than to the express words of the Lord as he undoubtedly would have done had his MS. of Matthew's gospel contained the formula.)

Evidences of the free use of the text of the gospels prompted by doctrinal interest, are, of course, abundant in patristic literature. The above quotation from Justin Martyr shows that the doctrine of baptismal regeneration was taught very early. Later it is insisted upon and elaborated in many patristic writings. It is to be expected that John 3:5 would be made to do service as a proof-text for this doctrine if it had been known in its present form. The author of the so called Apostolic Constitution (probably fourth century) writes:

He that will not be baptized shall be condemned as an unbeliever. * * * For the Lord says, "Except a man be baptized with water and the spirit he shall by no

means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Apos. Const. VI 15.)

He is so anxious to prove the need of baptism with water that he changes the text to read *baptized* instead of *born.*

In the Clementine Homilies IX, 26 (third century) is the following:

Being born again to God *of water*—you change your first generation. But otherwise it is impossible. For thus the prophet has sworn to us, saying, verily I say to you, except ye be born again *in running* (living) *water* into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost he shall not enter the kingdom of heaven

Here he is so anxious to prove regeneration by baptism with water that he omits the *spiritual* side of the new birth altogether and interpolates "running" water into the text. A little further on he writes, "If you are righteous baptism alone is lacking in order to salvation."

Hilary of Poitiers (born 300) quotes verses 7 and 8 as follows:

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. The Spirit breathes where it will and thou hearest the voice of it; but dost not know whence it comes or whither it goes. So is every one who is born *of water and* of the Holy Spirit."

Thus he inserts three words "of water and" into the 8th verse. Here is an evident interpolation which is found also in Sinaiticus and the old Syriac and Latin Versions

It seems extremely likely, from these quotations, that the doctrine of baptismal regenera-

tion prompted the interpolation of the "born of water" portion of John 3:5 as it stands in our Bible. And when in addition to these external evidences the whole conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus is taken into account the testimony of the patristic quotations is strongly confirmed. The reference to water is strikingly out of harmony with the thing Jesus is saying. The words referring to water are in no way implied in the context. If we omit from verse 3 the words Hilary interpolated into verse 8 we will find that they are not missed. Verse 3 will then read: "Except one be born of Spirit (i. e., spiritually) he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." Jesus is intending to make a sharp contrast in the mind of Nicodemus between the physical birth and the birth which he declares to be essential to entrance into his Kingdom. The antithesis is between "flesh" and "spirit." For him to mix the idea of a spiritual birth with the idea of emersion from water is to destroy the unity of his thesis and really to contradict it. All of which evidence, both external and internal, leads us to an agreement with Professor Norton in the conclusion that the reference to water in this passage is a second century interpolation, either intentional or due to a marginal gloss.

XVIII.

THE SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM

UP TO THIS point we have been striving to understand the essential meaning of baptism, its primary function in the Christian Church and in personal experience. This meaning we have described variously as the act of initiation into the Church, the act of incorporating a convert into the social Body of Christ, the act of conferring upon a candidate the status of a Christian, the act of self-identification with the Christian community, the act by which the Church defines itself as a distinct organism in the social order. All these are descriptive of one and the same act from somewhat varying points of view. They all refer to the essential meaning of baptism.

But the whole meaning of baptism is not included in this functional description. It possesses also a secondary meaning, a symbolism which has been imaginatively suggested by and imputed to the physical act of immersion in water. One of the *motifs* of our study all along has been to effectually distinguish the essential baptismal act from the physical act of immersion. The essential baptismal act is

social in character, not physical. It is a joint act of the Church and the candidate. Such an act cannot take place without some objective physical form or action to serve as its carrier and sign. All the purposes of society are carried out by the use of forms or tokens. The physical act of raising the right hand in taking oath, the signing of one's name in a contract, the kissing of the Bible in an inauguration, the handing over of his sword by the vanquished general, the clasping of right hands in a pledge of loyalty, the giving and receiving a ring in marriage—all these, not to multiply illustrations, are overt signs by which psychical acts of a social nature are carried out. Our whole life is shot through with this sign language. By means of it all our social meanings are conveyed, and there is no other way by which a corporate act can be performed.

In the act of initiation into the Church of Christ the physical form of immersion was used, as we have seen, in early times, as the outward sign or marker of the joint purpose of candidate and congregation. This physical sign was never confused, in the early time, with the spiritual thing signified, as has been true in our day. It was taken for granted, as the ring is taken for granted in the marriage rite or the raising of the right hand in the oath. There were no critics of the particular form

nor apologists for it. The sign was not a matter of conscience: the thing signified was the matter of conscience. The sign was hardly a matter even of consciousness. No gospel evangelist tried to persuade his hearer's will with respect to immersion; he tried to persuade his hearer's will with respect to the duty of identifying himself with Jesus Christ and the Christian community. Baptism was this act of self-identification, and immersion was the sign by which the baptismal act was carried out.

It is important for us to recognize the indispensableness of a baptismal sign. The life of every social community depends upon its receiving new members into its fellowship. A voluntary community like the Church can receive its members only by means of ceremony. It might be a very simple ceremony, with a very bare and casual sign like, perhaps, writing one's name in a book, or standing up to give assent to certain statements. Or it might be a very elaborate ceremony with very rich and involved formalities. We may argue that one sign is more fitting or less fitting than another, but we can not deny that some sign is necessary. The sign is the Church's method of distinguishing its members. If the Church were not able to distinguish its members it would be the same thing as if there were none. It is only through the sign that the Church is able

to define itself as a corporate community in the social order.

Any overt act may serve for signalizing and carrying out a social purpose. The only consideration is that it shall be understood and agreed to by those participating. Many signs of social acts, however, became such originally by virtue of some intrinsic or poetic suggestion contained in the act. For example, the custom of clasping right hands in mutual pledge or reconcilation indicated that the fighting hand and arm were now weaponless. The ring in marriage is a very ancient token, dating back to the time when it was used for purposes of signature. Its bestowal thus carried with it a beautiful compliment. Such signs were not mere signs of the social act which made use of them. They were also symbols. It was more fitting that they should be used than that the other sign should be used. They were not chosen arbitrarily; it was natural, almost instinctive, that they should be adopted in preference to a thousand others. So in the original use of immersion as the sign of initiation into a religious order—whether in Egypt or among Greeks or Jews—it seemed fitting that the transition from the old status to the new should be signalized by an immersion in water, an actual bath.

Thus at its origin, immersion was not only

a sign, it was also a symbol. It was not arbitrarily chosen, but it seemed to have a poetic appropriateness. The initiate had abandoned old habits, associations and interests as if they had been a pollution. He stood forth in his new relationship fresh as from an actual bath. It is not strange that immersion in water was so widely used as the token of this transition, not strange that the Jews adopted it as the sign and symbol of a proselyte's initiation into their religion. Nor is it to be wondered at that, through association, the sign gave its own name, baptism, to the thing signified.

In John the Baptist's use of immersion the symbolism of the act was enriched by the reflection into it of the ethical character of his baptism. His was a moral community of penitent men seeking righteousness. To be baptized into John's brotherhood was a moral act presupposing the forsaking of one's sins. Naturally the act of immersion lent itself to the symbolism of washing away sin or guilt. The physical ablution thus came to symbolize the cleansing of the soul.

In the Christian Church baptism was practiced by immersion and with no addition to its symbolism for some time. Ananias exhorts Saul to be baptized and "wash away" his sins. This expression indicates how closely the analogy between inward moral cleansing and the

washing of the body had been carried. Indeed the analogy was so close and fascinating that there was constant danger of degrading the moral character of baptism by identifying it with the physical act of immersion. So the author of I Peter felt it necessary in speaking of baptism to call attention to the fact that it was "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh but the search of a good conscience after God." Baptism has never lost this symbolism of cleansing which the act of immersion originally reflected so appropriately. And it is not likely to lose it so long as the words "clean" and "unclean" hold their place in our vocabulary as descriptive of states of the soul.

In addition to this obvious and original symbolism nothing was more natural than that the constant practice of immersion in the induction of new converts into the Christian life would suggest the imputation to it of a symbolism specifically Christian. All ceremony tends to take on new and richer symbolism by long continued use. This is especially true of a ceremony involving intimate and sacred personal experience. The heart instinctively idealizes the outward sign, reading into it poetic analogies of its own emotion. Thus in the circular shape of the wedding ring the heart finds an analogy to its unending love. The ring is more than a sign that one is married;

it is a symbol of the actual experience that makes marriage beautiful.

In like manner the baptismal ceremony was enriched by Christian experience. The outward sign of immersion in water lent itself happily to the influence of the poetic and mystical mind of Paul, who gave it a distinctive Christian symbolism. It is not too much to say that Paul *Christianized* immersion. He did so by imputing a Christian symbolism to it. Up to this time the symbolism of Christian baptism was essentially the same as that of John's baptism—the generic symbolism of cleansing which it possessed in common also with all religious orders that used immersion. Under Paul's hand immersion received a specific and distinctive symbolism. He read into it the significant features of Christianity as a historical religion and as a personal experience. It is not strange that a symbolism so rich and meaningful should be imputed to immersion when we consider that it stands at the very turning point in the soul's attitude toward the Christian gospel, the most stressful and intense moment of Christian experience.

The historic features of Christianity with which Paul imaginatively associated baptism were the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. These facts were to the apostle the pivotal facts of the Christian gospel. "Know ye

not," he asks, "that so many of you as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" "We are buried with him in baptism into his death, that like as Christ was raised up by the glory of God the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." This imagery was suggested to Paul, without doubt, by the act of immersion in water by which the ceremony of baptism was administered. It should be observed that Paul does not specifically speak of being *immersed* into Christ's death, or buried with him by *immersion*. This observation is very important. It would have been totally unlike Paul to have affirmed that a physical act could induct one into any spiritual state whatever. But because he is so thorough-going in his spiritual and ethical views, we must not, on that account, deny him the right of normal poetic expression. It can hardly be doubted that Paul's profound mystical insight into the identity of the soul's experience with the Master's experience found poetic affinity and suggestion in the beautiful act of immersion at baptism. "This very immersion," he would say, "shows forth the Lord's death, burial and resurrection. That he died and was buried is pictured by your burial in the watery grave; that he arose again from the dead is symbolized by your being raised again from the water." In this way

Paul made of immersion a monument to the great facts of historic Christianity.

Closely interwoven with this symbolism of historic Christianity is the symbolism of personal Christian experience. The latter is perhaps the main thought in Paul's mind in these utterances. He is dealing with actual Christian experience, the moral side of it. He affirms that the self dies and is buried and rises anew. The experience of death to sin and the burial of the "old man" is pictured by the burial in water. It was not alone for Christ to die and be buried; we also must die to sin and be raised from our burial, as he was raised from his, into newness of life. The temptation to tarry here with the substance of Paul's great redemptive thought is strong upon us. But we are studying it now with the humble purpose of disengaging the symbol from the substance. Our present interest is in the fact that into the outward act of immersion Paul read this profound experience of the soul and made it so that the very physical act by which one's baptism was consummated seems like a mirror in which one sees the reflection of one's self.

It is important to distinguish clearly between the *function* of baptism and its symbolism. Baptism itself is not a symbol, though it contains a symbolic element. The Book of Common Prayer has neither Scripture nor psychology

to support it when it says that baptism is "the outward sign of an inward grace." Baptism is not a mere outward sign of anything. It is a positive and efficacious moral act, as positive and efficacious as faith and repentance. It actually effects something. It changes the face of the soul's moral situation. Symbols do not effect anything. They "stand for" what is effected. The particular symbolism is a creation of the poetic or mystical imagination dwelling upon its inner experience and seeking analogies of that experience. Symbolism is always ideally *imputed* to the sign. It is never, even in its most appropriate and obvious instances, intrinsic and necessary. Baptism was without doubt administered in the early Church many years before any one thought to interpret its outward form as a picture of the salient facts of Christ's redemption and of the soul's transformation. Its function as initiation was not dependent upon any particular symbolism inhering in its outward sign.

The idea prevails quite generally in immersionist circles that the Saviour commanded immersion in order that in his Church there might be this perpetual dramatic memorial of his death, burial and resurrection. There is not an iota of evidence for this. It is altogether improbable. The symbolism of Christian baptism was put into it by Christian experience.

What our Lord commanded his disciples to do was to make disciples and to *baptize* them, that is, to initiate and incorporate them into a spiritual community. In the exercise of this baptismal function the Christian symbolism grew up. This is not to derogate from the beauty and sacredness of that symbolism, or from what we might call the authority of it, but it is important that we do not weigh down our Lord's lips with legalistic detail for which he was in no sense responsible.

It is important also for us to recognize that the realities do not depend upon the symbols but the symbols upon the realities. So great has the confusion upon the meaning of baptism become in certain minds that the reality of Christian experience is often denied those whose baptism was administered by affusion, because immersion, with its symbolism, was not employed. The realities of baptism are death to sin, burial of the old self and the rising up of the new self to walk henceforth with Christ. The presence of these realities of the spiritual life depends, as we contended in the previous chapter, upon baptism, but they do not depend upon the particular act of immersion. We do not die to sin and bury the old self by immersion in water. We do not rise into the new life by emerging from the water. The physical act is not spiritually efficacious. Millions of Chris-

tains there are who have been buried with Christ in baptism who have not been immersed in water. Of them any unbigoted judge will gladly affirm every spiritual reality which the most extreme water salvationist will affirm of himself. They have died to sin, they have been buried with Christ, they have risen with him into a new life. They are Christians, members of the Church of Christ. We would not be able to affirm these things of them if Paul had said that we were *immersed* into Christ, or *immersed* into his death. Paul did not allow his poetry, his mysticism, to lead him into any such magic or legalism. And we must not change Paul's statement that we are buried by *baptism*. Those who have been baptized without immersion have missed something. They have missed something valuable, something important. But they have missed nothing essential. There are, the present writer holds, good reasons why all converts should be immersed at their baptism and why the Church of Christ should practice only immersion in the solemnization of this rite, but neither our Bible nor our heart tolerates among these reasons one that disfranchises those who have come to their Saviour by some other sign.

XIX.

INFANT BAPTISM

THE READER will readily anticipate the attitude toward infant baptism which the logic of the previous chapters suggests. Baptism as the initiation of a willing individual into the Church of Christ could hardly be said to apply to unconscious infants. There is not the slightest New Testament precedent for the baptism of infants. On the contrary, within a half century after the death of the last apostle there was a controversy in the Church as to the minimum age at which candidates were proper subjects for baptism. One party took the position that thirty years (the age at which the Lord was baptized) should be the minimum and another argued for fourteen years (the age of puberty). Manifestly the Church was not accustomed to the baptism of any but voluntary adults. Moreover, the nature of the Church, in its original conception and in its actual character, logically bars the initiation of infants. The Church is a voluntary organization in the midst of society, set for the accomplishment of certain moral ends in the lives of its members and in the social order. Its strength as a moral

organization depends upon the voluntary moral purpose of its membership. The standard of its moral purpose is largely determined by the initiation requirements. If these requirements of membership are conceived as something less than the voluntary self-commitment of one who is spiritually qualified, the spiritual tone and power of the Church is bound to be lowered. Membership under those circumstances tends to become more or less hereditary, and consequently perfunctory. Personal moral decision tends to be displaced by a magical notion of baptism in which efficacy is imputed to the water or priestly authority or some other agent entirely external to the individual "baptized." The Church is a moral community; no one can be initiated into it except by a moral act of his own.

And besides, the nature of the child in the light of Christ's plain teaching makes it already a partaker of the grace which is mediated to others by baptism. "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," said Jesus. The child is the model of every follower of Christ, and needs no induction into any institution. The practice of infant baptism arose in connection with the totally un-Christian notions of original sin which began to be formulated in the early centuries of the Church. Among evangelical Protestant churches where this corrupt doctrine has be-

come obsolete, the ceremony of magically cleansing the child from sin in baptism has no further reason for being practiced. No conceivable benefit can accrue to the child from it.

And finally, the most casual observations will discover the fact that in those churches not strongly dominated by the doctrine of original sin, the really essential part of infant baptism, so far as the child is concerned, takes place not when the child is said to be baptized, but at confirmation. Initiation into the Church is not complete until the child is confirmed. The statistical reports of membership in the evangelical churches—Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist and the rest—do not as a rule include "baptized" infants. They are not so enrolled until they of their own accord assume as their own act that which parents and sponsors performed for them in their infancy.

This procedure, however, involves a needless and unwarranted confusion of terms. Baptism has a perfectly plain meaning in the New Testament, in history and in the creeds of the churches. It means induction, initiation into the Body of Christ. But if the actual induction in the case of infants who are said to be baptized is reserved until the infant becomes personally responsible, why call the earlier ceremony by the name of baptism? It would be less confusing to call the later ceremony baptism, for

although the historic and proper symbol of immersion in water is lacking in confirmation, there is in it the essential social meaning of baptism, namely, the self-commitment of the candidate and his induction into the Church.

But after this has all been said it remains to be confessed that the churches practicing infant baptism have been acting in the line of a true instinct and that immersionist churches in abrogating the practice and failing to supply a substitute for it have lost to the Church a very important function.

Baptist reformers would have done well had they heeded the caution in the German proverb against pouring out the baby with the bath. There was no need for the Church to let the baby go because it must let go the baptism. The parental instinct which finds misdirected expression in the rite of infant baptism is a true and holy instinct and deserves to be nurtured and satisfied by the Church instead of ignored or repressed by it.

The birth of a child is a great spiritual event in the experience of its parents. It is no less natural to turn to the Church in the awe of that hour than to turn to the Church in the hour of bereavement, or the hour of marriage. The emotions that are released by the entrance into the home of a new-born babe are essentially religious.

The feelings of gratitude, of hope, of awe, of responsibility, of tender love, all lift the soul toward God. And these emotions rush toward symbolic, ceremonial expression as if by instinct. The universal prevalence of some form of ritual at the birth of a child, among both civilized people and primitive tribes, in modern and ancient times, inside the pale of Christianity and among pagans and heathen, testifies to the reality and strength of this instinct. Only in a relatively small portion of Christendom, the section of those of immersionist belief to whom infant baptism is repugnant, do we find parenthood robbed of this most natural sacrament.

Society is interested in each newcomer. It is not only interested but morally involved in the new life. A child is not merely the offspring of its physical parents, it is the offspring of the social order. It is to take on the features of the social order in its own personal moral life. The all but universal custom of recognizing new-born children by a social ceremony of some sort testifies no less to a parental than to a natural social instinct. This implication of society itself in each child's personality is conceived by primitive and non-Christian people, no doubt, in very crude terms. But among Christians, and in a time when the idealistic interpretation of society is the chief fea-

ture of our ethical thinking, it is a pity that this unique occasion for the community to express itself should be either allowed to pass wholly by or be so identified with the utterly irrelevant rite of baptism as to confuse the essential and beautiful meaning of both sacraments.

Society should be made to feel its responsibility for each new child that enters its communal life. The Church, as the spiritual organ of the social order, has here an ideal chance to exercise its true function. The Church is the spiritual Mother of us all, a fact which needs constant re-emphasis. The Motherhood of the Church is a reality in religion second only to the fact of the Fatherhood of God. Upon the Church, therefore, should be impressed the glory and burden of the young life brought to it by the child's parents. In a heartful ceremony it should extend its welcome to the stranger, acknowledging its obligations, jointly with the parents, for his moral and spiritual welfare, and give solemn pledges to provide him every opportunity possible to attain the highest Christian character.

The ceremony in which such vows are taken by parents and congregation should be definitely distinguished from baptism. In a ceremony used by the writer for many years in the homes of his parish and in the public service of the church the parents promise, among other things,

that they will strive to guide their child so that "when he shall come to responsible years he may gladly offer himself in baptism to the service of Christ." The service is not called baptism. It could very well be called "Christening" if that name were not so closely identified with infant baptism in popular usage. But the parents and the church look upon it as a Dedication or Recognition service and participate in it without in the slightest degree confusing it with the baptismal rite.

As a matter of fact, in modern Protestantism, the rite of infant baptism has come to mean practically this parental dedication of the child to God and his welcome and recognition by the community through the Church. It is more a dedication of the parents than an initiation of the child, more a commitment of the Church to its spiritual responsibility than the conferment of a status upon the child. The idea of baptismal regeneration is hardly traceable in the modern Protestant practice of infant baptism. And, as was pointed out above, the mere "baptismal" rite is not deemed sufficient by itself to make infants full members of the Church. It would seem, therefore, that pedo-baptist and Baptist churches could easily enough find common ground in a ceremony of child dedication, which would leave the rite of baptism in its New Testament and historic place.

XX.

THE CASE FOR IMMERSION

ASSUMING that the interpretation of baptism given in these chapters is correct, what becomes of the practice of administering baptism by immersion only, as is the custom among Baptists, Disciples and other communions? Does the break-down of the immersion dogma carry with it the break-down of the immersion practice? Does the revision of the immersionist theory call for the adoption of the optional practice—affusion or immersion, as the candidate may elect—by such bodies as now practice immersion only?

Is there still a case for immersion?

There is a case for immersion and a strong case. It is not improbable that the unclamping of the whole subject of baptism from the legalism of the immersion dogma will result in the strengthening rather than the weakening of the immersion practice. It will set immersion free to testify for itself. It will put the intrinsic appropriateness of immersion above an arbitrary command. If the claims which immersionists have always made for their mode, apart from its having been ordained

by our Lord, are true claims they will take on a persuasiveness under the new interpretation which they could not possess under the old.

Before considering these elements of advantage which inhere in immersion, as contrasted with affusion or an optional procedure, the reader should remind himself afresh that the effect of our study so far is absolutely to break down the notion that any divine authority whatsoever stands behind the practice of immersion. We have seen that in the New Testament baptism means the conferment and acceptance of the status of a Christian. It is behind *this* act that the divine authority stands. But no divine authority represented in the New Testament ever engaged itself to fix or standardize a particular physical device by which this social act should be carried out. Custom, as we have seen, had already standardized immersion in water for just this purpose.

The facts are analogous to our concept of marriage, with which we associate the giving and receiving of a ring; or taking oath, with which we associate the raising of the right hand; or inauguration, with which we associate the kissing of the Bible; or voting, with which we associate the marking of a paper ballot; or surrender, with which we associate the handing over of one's sword; or pledging one's honor, with which we associate the clasping of

right hands; or ordination, with which we associate the laying on of hands.

Marriage is not equivalent to giving and receiving a ring; taking oath is not equivalent to raising the hand; inauguration is not equivalent to kissing the Bible; voting is not equivalent to marking a paper ballot; surrender is not equivalent to handing over one's sword; to pledge one's honor is not equivalent to the clasping of right hands; ordination is not equivalent to the laying on of hands.

Neither is baptism equivalent to immersion in water.

If now we abandon the immersion dogma which makes a physical sign the equivalent of the thing signified there remains, nevertheless, a certain presumption in favor of the continued use of the particular physical sign which was associated in the founding days of the Church with the act of baptism. There is something to be said for custom and historical precedent. They are not authoritative, to be sure, in any statutory sense. But they are often the carriers of historic human experience which enriches our own experience. The reason the marriage service of the Church of England is universally preferred among Protestants of many denominations is not that no new service can be formulated equal in literary excellence to that, but because that is the service by which

the great ones of our English speaking world, including kings and queens, have been wedded; and in its use each new pair has a certain subconscious sense of fellowship with all who have entered the holy estate by that way. In like manner the device of immersion, coming down to us from the classic period of the Church, brings to each new convert the sense of participation in the life of the early disciples. This perhaps aesthetic appraisal of immersion makes for its present and continued use a certain favorable presumption, and unless there are good and substantial reasons against its continued and exclusive use it would seem by itself to be a strong enough case.

But there are other considerations favorable to immersion. Among these it is needed only to mention the natural symbolism which, as we have seen in a previous chapter, immersion possesses. The cleansing of the soul portrayed by the cleansing bath, gives to the practice of immersion a precedence over any other device. And when to this natural symbolism is added the specifically Christian symbolism with which Paul invested the rite, immersion is seen to possess a dignity and richness of content which should give pause to the church that would substitute anything else for it.

A third consideration in favor of immersion is one that is often urged against its use,

namely, its difficulty and relative inconvenience. It is a debatable point, it will be admitted, but there is something to be said in favor of launching the Christian life by the use of an impressive ritualistic device in conferring Church membership upon the convert. The value of elaborate ritual at the initiation of a candidate into a lodge or other fraternal society is generally recognized. It is very doubtful if the Church gains anything by making admission to its membership too casual an affair. On the contrary, the physically impressive act of being immersed in water tends to register deep in the soul the fact of a complete break with the old life and to make vivid in memory the holy vows involved in becoming a Christian.

A final consideration in favor of the practice of immersion is its relation to the growing cause of Christian unity. Immersion is the only catholic mode of baptism. That is to say, it is the device which is everywhere acceptable in the Christian world. It therefore lends itself as an available solution of the baptism controversy to those who desire to practice Christian unity. It is exclusively the practice of the Greek Orthodox church. It is practiced optionally by practically all pedo-baptist Protestant denominations. It is acknowledged by the Roman church to be the apostolic and even

now acceptable practice. In the interest, therefore, of Christian unity the practice of immersion has a strong and unique claim. Its practice does not offend the conscience of anyone. The practice of affusion does offend the consciences of those who hold to the immersion dogma. As an irenic measure immersion is a solution of the present divided state of mind of the Church on the question of baptism.

Certainly a movement actuated by the ideals which the Disciples of Christ are striving to foster could consistently do not otherwise than to administer baptism exclusively by immersion. Their mission is one of peace in the divided Church. Their fundamental presupposition is that the living Church is already one, and that her present and urgent duty is to manifest this hidden unity by abandoning every sectarian and divisive practice. The genius of the Disciples' movement is the determination to abandon those practices which underlie and maintain the denominational order. Their normative ecclesiastical principle is an ethical principle stated by Paul: "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world stands." If a human creed makes divisions in the Body of Christ we will have no creed, they say, but the divine creed on which all Christians may unite. If a human name makes divisions we will wear no name but

Christ's name. If elaborate extra-Scriptural forms of organization and polity make divisions we will reduce our forms of organization to the simplest terms compatible with efficiency in the work of the Kingdom. If the practice of sprinkling in the administration of baptism is repugnant to the conscience of a large portion of Christ's followers, and causes division among them, we will administer baptism by that mode which alone is acceptable to the consciences of all.

Whatever the non-Disciple reader may think of this principle and its application to the problem of Christian unity, it is, as a matter of fact, the basic principle upon which the Disciples have for a century proceeded. It is true that the preponderance of opinion among them has agreed with Alexander Campbell's interpretation of baptism as identical with the specific physical act of immersion in water, and hence the ethical principle just referred to has been mixed with and often displaced by the out-and-out dogmatic principle. But not all Disciples hold with Campbell to the immersion dogma. Yet they are no less Disciples. And in the historic ideal of their movement for the practice of Christian unity they possess a principle which commits them to the practice of immersion, whether the doctrine of baptism to which Mr. Campbell committed the move-

ment is valid or invalid. A movement whose basic presupposition it is that on the level of conscience, on the level of the spiritual essentials, the divided Church is already one, that even Baptists and pedo-baptists are already one, and which seeks to manifest this unity by the actual practice of a catholic fellowship, could not do otherwise in the present state of the Church's mind than to practice immersion only.

It is usually assumed by writers on this subject that the principle of individual choice between affusion and immersion is a more liberal and catholic practice than the practice of immersion only, and that, therefore, the cause of unity will be advanced by relegating the whole question of particular mode to the conscience of the individual, giving him his choice among two or three modes.

This, of course, is inherently impossible for those to do who set themselves to practice Christian unity. For besides the conscience of the individual candidate the conscience of the Church is involved in the act of baptism. We have seen that baptism is not an individualistic sacrament but an organic function of the Church of Christ. It is a joint act of candidate and community. A community proceeding on the catholic purpose to include in its fellowship all Christians obviously could not

perform the rite of baptism by a mode in which the consciences of a considerable portion of its membership could not participate.

Moreover, it is an anomalous situation which the optional procedure creates. It allows the candidate to dictate to the community by what manner he shall be initiated. This situation does not obtain in the case of other social organizations, where the mode of initiation fixed by the custom of the order is accepted without question or suggestion by each candidate. The attempt is often made by advocates of optional modes of baptism to draw an analogy between such a procedure and the variety of wedding services from which a contracting pair may make their choice. But this analogy is fallacious, because the Church, into which the candidate is baptized, is a definite social *organism,* a freemasonry of spiritual life, whose members either actually or ideally participate in the baptismal act; while matrimony, the holy estate into which the wedding service initiates a man and woman, is simply a social *status* involving no organic participation but only a public declaration of intention upon the part of the contracting pair.

But in addition to all this is the decisive consideration that to adopt a single universally acceptable mode, and to practice that mode alone, is a sure way to end the baptism controversy.

A sure way to keep alive the baptism controversy and the division which grows out of it is to keep two or three modes of baptism at hand for the option of each candidate. Not until the mode is made single and identical will it pass from the level of controversy and conscience to the matter-of-course level, where it belongs. The thing to be conscious of in baptism, and to have a conscience upon, is baptism itself, not immersion nor sprinkling nor any mere physical act. The implication in the practice of plural modes is that the mode chosen by the candidate is held to be superior in virtue to the others. This implication diverts attention in greater or less degree from the essential virtue of baptism itself.

In closing this chapter the reader's attention should, perhaps, be directed to the fact that, in the author's view, the practice of immersion only, does not justify the Baptist and Disciple practice of imposing re-baptism by immersion upon unimmersed Christian people who bring credentials of membership from affusion practicing churches. This subject will be discussed in a later chapter under the title, "Re-baptism."

XXI.

BAPTISTS AND DISCIPLES AND BAPTISM

The Place of Baptism

THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST have less reconstruction to undergo in their views of baptism than have their brethren of the Baptist denomination. On the translation of the word both share the same error. Both have gone on the fallacious assumption that because the word *baptizo* in its primary usage in the Greek classics means "immerse," it therefore means the same in a New Testament context. Upon both, therefore, devolves the equal task of adjusting themselves to the correct translation of the word as denoting initiation or induction into a religious community or order.

But to the Disciples it will, perhaps, come somewhat easier to fit a correct translation into their accustomed exegesis of the Scripture texts than to the Baptists. In their fear of the doctrine of water regeneration, or anything approaching it, the Baptists have, to the present writer's way of thinking, played fast and loose with the texts of Scripture in which baptism and salvation are juxtaposed. When our Lord

says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," and when Peter says: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the remission of your sins," and when Ananias says to Saul: "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins," the Disciple mind cannot do otherwise than infer that baptism has something to do with salvation, that its place is among the factors that condition salvation.

The Baptist mind, however, has been trained to a very different habit toward such Scriptural statements. What that habit is is disclosed in an article appearing recently in a leading Baptist newspaper, written in advocacy of what is called the "open membership" practice, i. e., the practice of receiving people into their churches on the ground of inward "spiritual" experience without baptism (immersion). The writer says, with delicious naiveté:

> When we came to read them [such passages as the above] with our present inquiry clearly defined, we found that these passages on their face only seemed to make baptism a condition of salvation or remission of sin, and we long ago learned how to rid them of that meaning by interpretation, and having gotten rid of their apparent surface teaching of the essentiality of baptism to salvation, we found that they contained no teaching as to the essentiality of baptism to anything.

The accustomed Baptist exegesis makes of baptism a sacrament of obedience, but wholly disconnects it from the act of uniting with the Church. The so-called "open-membership"

Baptist churches in England (of which there are a great many) confer membership upon candidates who do not wish to be "baptized," their "baptism" being regarded as an individualistic matter between their own consciences and Christ, just as participation in the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a question of individual conscience. This leads to the practice of "deferred baptism," and it is not uncommon for one who has been a member of the Church for many years to ask and receive the sacrament of immersion in water as a personal act of obedience to Christ!

The theory of baptism underlying this procedure has not an iota of Scripture to support it. In the New Testament baptism is always administered as the rite of initiation into the Christian life. Joining the Church is not an act that either follows or precedes baptism; it *is* baptism. Baptism is not a *movable* ordinance; it cannot be administered at just any stage of the Christian life. Its whole significance inheres in its initiatory character. It is not an individualistic act. It is a social act, a joint act, in which Church and candidate participate, in which the penitent believer commits himself to Christ and the Church, and the Church, by Christ's authority, confers upon him the status of a Christian. To abstract the physical and symbolic features of baptism from its *function*

and to set up the physical act as an "ordinance" by itself is simply to *invent* an ordinance which had no existence in the New Testament Church and to which no New Testament allusion to baptism corresponds.

This divorce of baptism from Christian initiation is the cause of all our woes in respect of this rite. Those Baptists who say that baptism *follows* the act of uniting with the Church and those Disciples who say that baptism is a *precedent condition* of uniting with the Church, are equally wrong. Baptism, as has just been stated, neither precedes nor follows the act of uniting with the Church; it is the act itself.

Baptists, therefore, have to undergo the process of overhauling their exegesis as well as retranslating the Greek word.

The Disciples, on the other hand, long ago formed the habit of looking unflinchingly at the Scripture passages which plainly coupled baptism with salvation. In face of the charge from their Baptist brethren that they taught water salvation—a charge that it is impossible to evade if baptism is regarded, after the fashion of Alexander Campbell's teaching, as immersion in water—the Disciples have insisted upon grouping baptism with faith and repentance as "terms of pardon." (This legalistic phrase, "terms of pardon," is happily becoming obsolete among them.) In doing so they have main-

tained a sound exegesis which gives them an advantage over their Baptist brethren in adjusting their mental habit to the truth about baptism. All they have to do is to recognize that baptism in the New Testament is not immersion at all, nor, of course, sprinkling, nor any physical act whatever, but the social and moral act of initiation into the Church of Christ. They are not called upon to change their exegesis of the Scripture in the least. They simply have to change their accustomed translation of the Greek word *baptizo*. It will hardly be denied by any one that baptism, in the true sense of taking one's place in the organic fellowship of Christian believers, is a true factor in salvation, thoroughly ethical and totally devoid of legalism or hint of water regeneration.

It should be pointed out in this place that among Christian bodies the Disciples of Christ are somewhat distinctive in the production of an evangelism which includes baptism as a part of the conversion experience. Unlike their Christian neighbors, they have made no essential distinction between becoming a Christian and uniting with the Church of Christ. With them the "conditions of pardon" are identical with the conditions of membership in the Church. Baptism is not only the gateway into the Church, but also a step in the process by which forgiveness is realized. With most evan-

gelical bodies the soul is pardoned, saved, before baptism. Being baptized and joining the Church are further acts, standing, so to speak, by themselves. The main emphasis is put upon faith and repentance, upon the subjective experience; and baptism, if enjoined at all, receives attention as a sort of after-thought. With the Disciples baptism is no after-thought, but an integral factor in the conversion of the soul. As a consequence, in Disciple evangelism there is no such disparity between the number of reported conversions and the number of Church members as obtains with others. One hundred or one thousand conversions means one hundred or one thousand Church members.* It will be plainly seen that this placing of baptism in the conversion process helps to explain somewhat the notable growth of the Disciples' body.

But it is doubtful if even the Disciples have fully recognized the wider bearing of their practice. Their preaching of baptism has made it a detached static sacrament whose essential meaning inheres in the physical act of immersion. They have failed to see that whatever efficacy or value baptism possesses is due not

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*A qualification should, perhaps, be made to this sweeping statement in view of the marked present day tendency to imitate the type of evangelism prevailing in other religious bodies. But until very recent times the statement would hold absolutely.

to any virtue inherent in the physical act, or to the abstract authority of Christ who is assumed to command it, but to the Church into whose moral freemasonry it admits the penitent believer. The initiatory character of baptism has been confused if not wholly eclipsed by its legalistic interpretation, and in its place the "Right Hand of Fellowship" has grown into an institution almost of the dignity of a Church ordinance. That is to say, the place of baptism in the conversion process has been regarded in individualistic terms as an act of legal obedience to Christ by which the pardon of past sins was to be secured. The idea that the pardoning efficacy of baptism lay in the spiritual connection which it established between the convert and the community of believers by making him a member of the social Body of Christ, has not been preached. Instead of this, baptism has been preached for its own sake, or for the sake of sheer obedience to Christ's authority, which amounts to the same thing. A baptism consciousness has been created which is something else than the Church membership consciousness. And thus the socializing function of baptism has been practically overlooked.

XXII.

BAPTISTS AND DISCIPLES AND BAPTISM

Re-Baptism

WITH THE deepening sense of fellowship and fundamental unity among the Christian denominations, characteristic of our time, there has grown up among Baptists and Disciples a vigorous body of sentiment in protest against the practice of imposing re-baptism upon Christian people who seek admittance to the local churches of these immersionist communions. According to the established custom of these bodies a person bringing a certificate of membership from a Congregationalist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or other evangelical church is required to be re-baptized unless he had been immersed originally. His credentials are, practically, ignored. He is treated precisely as one who unites by confession of faith.

Among Baptists it is the usual procedure to require an "experience" from such a one and among Disciples he is required to "come forward" and make the "good confession" before his re-baptism, even though his credentials in-

dicate that he has been for many years an active and devout Christian and a member in good standing of the Church of Christ.

The unfraternal implications of this procedure are only in recent years becoming conscious to the better minds among Baptists and Disciples. To the out-and-out legalists among them these implications have always been conscious and have been accepted without wincing. The legalists have justified the practice of re-baptism on the ground that unimmersed persons could lay no Scriptural claims to be called Christians, and the affusion-practicing churches from which their credentials come could lay no Scriptural claim to be called churches of Christ. A church of Christ, according to their interpretation of the New Testament, is a community of penitent believers in Christ who were baptized by immersion. To refuse to honor the credential of an affusion-practicing church and enroll the bearer of it as a member of the Baptist or Disciple congregation without further ceremony is to the legalist a deliberate and logical procedure for the full implications of which he is willing to be responsible.

Yet even he tries to save himself from his cold-blooded logic by inventing the fiction called the "uncovenanted mercies" of God. By this device he leaves open the door of possibility

for the final salvation of these Methodists, Presbyterians, and others like them, who have not satisfied the "terms" of God's covenanted mercies, of which terms immersion in water is one item. Of course this idea that God has something "up his sleeve," so to speak, which he may use at his discretion at the last day, is thoroughly repugnant to the evangelical faith which rests upon the assumption that in Christ God revealed Himself, his whole Self, and that when the Saviour's heart broke on Calvary it spilled upon mankind the infinite and unreserved mercy of the Father. We must believe that whatever mercy was "covenanted" in Christ Jesus is all the mercy there is.

But the finer spirits in both these immersion-practicing bodies recoil at the implications of their practice. They are coming to see with some degree of clearness that to refuse to honor a credential from another congregation and to refuse to receive the bearer of it is to affront that other congregation, to discredit the previous church affiliation of the bearer of the credential and to invalidate his Christian status and experience. Such a procedure is the very essence of sectarianism. Indeed it may properly be called congregational phariseeism, and is rightly resented by affusion-practicing churches who know that its "holier than thou" implications are totally unfounded.

That the full bearing of the practice of re-baptism has not been more consciously discerned by the more catholic-minded among Baptists and Disciples is due to two causes: First, the great confusion of thought as to what baptism is, and secondly the dominance of the denominational point of view.

I.

Disregarding now the English Baptists,* we may say that, however Disciples and Baptists differ in their view of the relation of baptism to salvation, they agree in making immersion a prerequisite to membership in their churches. The unfraternal logic of their procedure in demanding that an unimmersed Christian, a Presbyterian, for example, shall be treated solely in his individual capacity and subjected to the tests and the rites that prevail in receiving a new convert into fellowship, should not be difficult to discern. Not having been immersed he has not been baptized, for immersion is baptism. And not having been baptized he is not a member of the Church. The so-called Presbyterian church from which he comes and whose credential he bears is there-

*Amongst the English Baptists the problem of re-baptism has been practically solved by making "baptism" a "movable" ordinance, and, hence, properly celebrated either before or at any time after uniting with the Church, a totally non-Scriptural conception, as we have seen.

fore not a sister church of Christ. The credential itself, therefore, has no significance.

That this is the tacit logic of the practice of re-baptism is inescapable. When pressed by their logic, it is a common strategy of both Baptists and Disciples to shuffle the issue into terms involving the fictitious distinction between the invisible and the visible Church, a distinction which serves practically the same purpose as the "uncovenanted mercies" to which we referred above. It is only in recent years that this convenient invention of theology has been tolerated among Disciples. Its use among Baptists, as among most denominations, was one of the provoking causes which led the Disciples in 1830 to cease to be Baptists. In recent times, however, it has come into use even among Disciples and, interestingly enough, for the very purpose of extricating the Disciples from the harsh logic in which their practice of re-baptism entangles them. According to this accommodating distinction a congregation of Presbyterians may be safely said to belong to the *invisible* Church. We are thus relieved of the disagreeable responsibility of discounting their work for the cause of Christ in the world, or clouding in the least their hope of personal salvation. But their *visible organization* is not the organization Christ established on the earth nor any part thereof. As

an *organization* this particular Presbyterian "church" does not belong to the visible Church and is therefore not on a parity with a Baptist or Disciples church which practices immersion. The credentials from the Presbyterian organization may thus be ignored without involving us in any disrespect for the Christian character of its members or for their Christian work in the world. But we cannot recognize their congregation as a church of Christ without recognizing the validity of the initiation by which membership in it is conferred. We cannot recognize this initiation because Christ ordained specifically that initiation into his Church should be administered by immersion in water, which brings us back to the point from which we started, and so the logical vicious circle is complete.

The only way to treat this sophistry is to declare unequivocally that the Church of the New Testament is a visible, social institution and that that is the only Church of Christ there is. It is an organism growing right here in this present world, in the soil of our common social life. The supra-mundane Church is a fiction devised to save a legalistic theology from appearing to be, as it really is, unchristian.

A Presbyterian congregation is a church of Christ, or it is not. If it is not a church of Christ, an organic member of the Body of

Christ, the Body of Christ should clearly define itself in theory and in practice so as to leave on the outside all Presbyterian congregations and others like them. But if it is a church of Christ it must be treated as one, and its credentials accepted at their face value by all sister churches of Christ on peril of such churches practicing schism in the Body.

The view of baptism set forth in these chapters relieves us of the need of all forced theological fictions and provides us with a logical justification of the course which the hearts of all the more generous-minded churchmen among us prompt us to pursue. Without the slightest mental reservation we are left free to affirm that a Presbyterian church is a church of Christ, just as truly as a Disciples or a Baptist church is a church of Christ. Its baptism, i. e., its initiation, is valid. The worst we can say of it is that it was *irregularly performed*. Regularity in the administration of the rite of initiation into the Church of Christ —historical regularity, dating back to apostolic practice—demands that the candidate be baptized by immersion in water. But immersion is not essential in order to give *validity* to the initiation. Any doctrine of baptism whose effect is to unchurch the Church, as Thomas Campbell warned his son, Alexander, is surely fallacious.

When a Presbyterian Christian applies for membership in a Baptist or Disciples church, bringing a credential of membership in a Presbyterian church of Christ, every consideration of Christian fraternity demands that he be received as a brother in the Lord, whether his baptism, his initiation into the Church, happened to have been performed by immersion or by some other mode. The important and only vital inquiry to make in his case is not, "*How* did he get into the Church?" but, "Is he in?". If he is already in, it is not only unfraternal but farcical to impose re-baptism, i. e., re-initiation, upon him, unless he himself is dissatisfied and, for the sake of regularity or any conscientious reason, asks to be re-initiated.

II.

When we come to consider the second cause of unclear thinking on the significance of this strange practice of re-baptism we reach a point where the characteristic thought processes of Baptists and Disciples sharply diverge. This second cause is mentioned above as the dominance of the denominational point of view. A recent writer, President E. Y. Mullins, of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says, "As I see the matter, the open-membership plea proceeds on the assumption that all denominationalism is wrong, that of Baptists as well

as others. I can respect the motives of any one who honestly opposes all denominationalism, however little I may esteem his views." It is not clear from the context in which Dr. Mullin's statement occurs whether by "open membership" he means the practice of receiving members of affusion-practicing churches without re-baptism or the English Baptist practice of receiving new converts on profession of faith without regard to "baptism" at all. These are two radically different practices and must not be confused. The English practice does not proceed on the assumption that all denominationalism is wrong. It has nothing to do with a theory of denominationalism. It proceeds on the assumption that baptism has nothing essential to do with becoming a member of the Church of Christ. That theory of baptism has already been shown by these chapters to be wholly untenable.

But if by "open membership" President Mullins refers to the practice of receiving into membership those who are already Christians without imposing re-baptism upon them, he is exactly right when he connects it with the growing feeling that denominationalism is wrong. Such a statement interprets the more or less conscious motive of those Baptist churches in America that have adopted the practice, and it interprets the altogether con-

scious and irresistible logic urged by those congregations of Disciples that have adopted it. Among Disciples the term "open membership" is not popular, but the procedure is felt to be the very essence of "the practice of Christian union" and is so described. Among Baptists, in general, the denominational point of view still dominates, and most of the objections to the more generous procedure are based on the need of preserving sharp denominational boundaries and distinctions.

One of the reasons given by President Mullins for the continued practice of re-baptism is that it aids in maintaining the integrity and efficiency of the Baptist denomination. He magnifies the differences between an unimmersed and an immersed Christian to such a degree as to prompt him to invent the term "composite membership" to characterize a congregation made up of both immersed and unimmersed Christians. Such a congregation, he declares, would represent a type of Christianity so "colorless" and with "motives so feeble" that it "would be without vitality enough to differ." "Composite churches" of this sort, Dr. Mullins further says, "are repugnant to the enlightened Christian conscience." "It is infinitely better for the world that Christians embody their convictions in distinct organizations, love each other and co-operate in all practicable

ways, than that our Christianity should become so colorless and our motives so feeble that we would be without vitality enough to differ."*

Those who hold, as Dr. Mullins and the great majority of Baptists seem to do, that "distinct organizations," that is, denominations, are not wrong naturally lack the powerful motive for the practice of a catholic fellowship possessed by those who hold that the denominational order of the Church is sinful and ought to be abandoned. Here is the point at which the Disciples should especially feel the incongruity between their essential ideals and their practice of re-baptism. If denominationalism is a good thing, or even an inevitable thing, the Disciples could easily enough justify re-baptism as a device for keeping up their own distinctness as a denomination. But their primary thesis is that they are not a denomination. They belong to that rapidly growing class of churchmen who "proceed upon the assumption that denominationalism is wrong"—that of Baptists and Disciples, as well as others—whose motives Dr. Mullins says he respects but for whose views he intimates he has but little esteem. Among Disciples of Christ this condemnation of denominationalism and every denominational practice is charac-

*These quotations are taken from an article by Dr. Mullins in The Standard (Baptist newspaper), May 9, 1914.

teristic and historic. Their organized movement is interpreted by them as a movement on behalf of Christian unity. They proceed on the clearly defined purpose to abandon every distinctive item of denominational procedure and to practice essential Christianity, the Christianity of the New Testament, the Christianity common to and underlying our divided groups of evangelical Christians.

It is a great ideal they have set themselves, an ideal which the present writer would not claim they have fully lived up to. But he would claim that in many respects they have faithfully lived up to it. They have refused to wear a denominational name, to impose a denominational creed, to practice a denominational mode of baptism, to celebrate a denominational communion. They have insisted upon wearing the catholic name, Christian; upon requiring assent to the catholic creed, the personal Lordship and divinity of Christ; upon the practice of the catholic mode of baptism, immersion, which has been received everywhere and at all times and by all Christians as an acceptable mode of initiation into the Church, and can be practiced without offense to the conscience of any believer; and upon the celebration of the catholic communion, neither inviting nor debarring any one from Christ's table.

At how many points the Disciples may have failed to measure up to their great vision of catholicity it is not to our present purpose to suggest, save in one particular: they have failed to maintain a catholic fellowship. Starting out on the program of keeping the door of their churches open "as wide as the gate of heaven," the pioneers of the Disciples' movement afterward became Baptists, owing mainly to their conversion to the immersion dogma and their desire to avoid even the appearance of starting a new denomination. When, after nearly twenty years of unabsorbed identity with the Baptists, there came a rupture, the "reformers" carried with them the denominational conception of a closed church membership and the denominational practice of re-baptism. This conception and practice have survived until this day among the Disciples. During all the years there have been voices raised to challenge it, sporadic protests and appreciable restlessness of conscience under the sense of its inconsistency with fundamental principles, but not until recent years has this restlessness and protest come to social self-consciousness within the communion.

In our day many of the more progressive and generous-minded Disciples of Christ are sensitively aware of the inhibition that rests upon their plea for Christian unity so long as

they contradict it in their own practice. These men of catholic spirit are going back of Alexander Campbell to Thomas Campbell, the real inspirer of their historic movement, and while agreeing with the son that immersion only should be the Church's practice of administering baptism, they hold with the father in his earlier view when, in discussing this very question of re-baptism, he said: "As for those who are already members of the Church and participants of the Lord's Supper, I can see no propriety. . . . in their unchurching or paganizing themselves, or in putting off Christ, merely for the sake of making a new profession; thus going out of the Church merely for the sake of coming in again."

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